

**The Impact of Learning English as a Foreign Language on the Identity and  
Agency of Saudi Women**

**Submitted by Rami Fawwaz Mustafa to the University of Exeter as a thesis  
for  
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## **Abstract**

This study investigated whether or not English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has an impact on the identity and sense of agency of Saudi women studying English in Saudi Arabia; and how Saudi women perceive the role of English in negotiating their identity and roles in the Saudi community. The study also aims to provide a better understanding of the status of English in Saudi Arabia in general, and as it pertains specifically to Saudi women; and what discourses instigate Saudi women to invest in learning English in Saudi Arabia. The study was informed by a *mélange* of theoretical underpinnings, most notably, 'braided feminism' that encompasses three feminist traditions (poststructuralist feminism, intersectionality, and Islamic feminism). Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) were used to collect the data; and 12 Saudi women were interviewed to get their perceptions on the topic.

The findings indicate that English in Saudi Arabia is highly prized and considered as a key to employment and individual economic prosperity. Despite the consensus on its importance to Saudis and the Saudi society, the magnitude of its importance and the possibility of it being exaggerated were heavily debated. Three levels can explain the widespread use of English in Saudi Arabia: 1) macro (national and societal changes), 2) meso (changes in foreign language education policies), and 3) micro (language usage by social groups and individuals in Saudi Arabia). The data revealed a wide array of investment discourses in the form of: (a) push and pull factors for learning English, and (b) push and pull factors for choosing Saudi Arabia to learn English. The participating Saudi women felt that learning English had a positive impact on their identities; and that the most positive impact was to their positive personal traits. The data also showed how Saudi women assume various identity positions and how learning English helped them to navigate through various positions. The most important finding in this section was that the agency of the Saudi women was not one of resistance, but rather, of piousness; i.e., Saudi women chose to exercise their agency by conforming to the religious norms and traditions in Saudi Arabia, and at the same time, strove to change these structures to allow more freedom. In addition, the study revealed several obstacles that could hinder the Saudi women's investment in English.

The study concluded with implications for the participants, researchers in this area, language institutes in Saudi Arabia, and foreign language policy makers Kingdom-wide.

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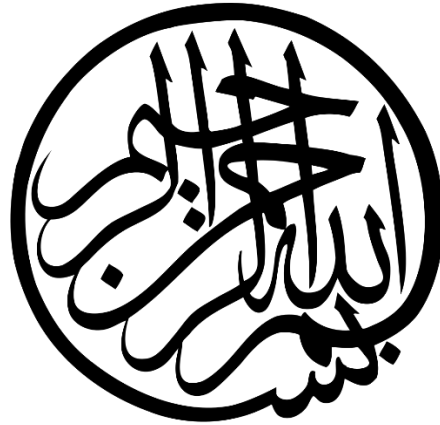
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## Dedication



I dedicate this thesis to the most loved ones:

My mother; my wife Rokaya; my children, Riwa, Renata,  
Yousef, and Dana; and to the soul of my father who  
departed before he could see his dream come true.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

I have had the pleasure of teaching Saudi women both in Canada and in Saudi Arabia. My experience teaching Saudi women; however, has been perplexing for me as a teacher, as a doctoral student in the field of TESOL, and as a social researcher since the reality of Saudi women is not typical. My professional experience as an English instructor and as an administrator both in Canada and Saudi Arabia was a valuable source that led to my interest in this study. My experience with Saudi women in Canada led me to observe the great effort Saudi women exert in learning English. That observation instigated me to research this phenomenon to uncover the true investment of Saudi women in learning English using Bonny Norton's theory of investment. The study yielded rich data that resembled, to a great extent, the field of ESL. My experience in Saudi Arabia; however, was different and it rekindled my interest in the topic of learning English and Saudi Arabia. At my workplace, where I served as an administrator for a professional English program, the aim was to help Saudi employees who had graduated from local universities with limited English proficiency. During my term, I was asked to use statistical reporting for the applications and intake to the program. I discovered that despite men being more often hired than women in my company; the number of women applicants to the program outnumbered the number of men. This finding was intriguing and led me to re-design my earlier study to uncover the reasons for such a phenomenon.

While working in Canada, I was aware of the discourses that surround Saudi women that are perpetuated by Western media; i.e., Saudi women are suppressed, are limited in their movements, and lack freedom, among other things. I also noticed that Saudi women, and Muslim women in general, are all painted with the same brush, which assigns them to a collective identity. My experience teaching Saudi women in Canada and Saudi Arabia offered a different reality from that mongered by the Western/orientalist discourses as the Saudi women were aware of their abilities, identity, and sense of agency. The juxtaposition of the discourses

was also a driving force for my choice to study this issue in greater depth within the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

## 1.2 Setting the Context: The Schizophrenic Effect in Saudi Arabia

Although Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam, and at the same time, one of the economic forces in the region, it enjoys what I call the “schizophrenic effect,” which refers to the co-existence of many contradicting and competing paradigms that are advocated by a single body (The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) in a single geographical area. Al-Rasheed (2013) designated a full chapter of her book to tackle what she calls the “woman question” and discussed some of the contradicting paradigms with a sociopolitical lens. She highlighted that “After decades of ignoring the ‘woman question’, both state and society recognize a problem, although there is still no consensus with respect to causes and solutions” the ‘woman question’ has begun to be “discussed vigorously both within Saudi society and the international community” (p. 2-3).

One of the prevalent paradigms in Saudi Arabia is the *essentialist/social structuralist* paradigm, which is also known in the Arab world as the *conservative approach*. In the case of Saudi Arabia, it is represented mostly by the governmental and masculine positions that see biology (being born a woman) and social structure (women’s status and roles in Saudi Arabia) as a basis for their identity. Bucholtz (2003) explained that essentialism refers to:

the position that the attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: (1) that groups can be clearly delimited, and (2) that group members are more or less alike (p. 400).

The essentialist paradigm is forced upon women in Saudi Arabia by virtue of the Wahabi interpretation of shari’a laws that dictate all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia, and which have remained largely unchanged, and by the prescribed roles and assumptions dictated by the society that focuses on the role of Saudi women as mothers and wives (Miller-Rosser, Chapman, & Francis, 2006). Yamani (2000) pointed out that “although interpretations of ‘correct’ Islamic behavior influence all sections of society, local customs, norms, and tribal traditions actually dictate

women's roles and are enforced through familial structure" (p. 96). According to Doumato (2010), "...gender inequality is built into Saudi Arabia's governmental and social structures, and is integral to the country's state-supported interpretation of Islam, which is derived from a literal reading of the Koran and Sunna" (p. 425). Cooke (2007) created a neologism that captures this essentialism, "Muslimwoman," which refers to "an imposed identification the individual may or may not choose for herself. The Muslimwoman is not a description of reality, it is an ascription of a label that reduces all diversity to a single image" (p.140).

In opposition to that paradigm, the Saudi women with whom I have worked and taught exercised great, and at times excessive, subjectivity and agency. The Saudi women I witnessed can be subjectively described using Weedon's (1997) words as involving "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation in the world" (p. 32). The sense of subjectivity develops an understanding of *agency* that Duff (2012) defines as "people's abilities to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation" (p. 417). That agency is not restricted only to their roles as wives and mothers, but it goes further and includes decisions about pursuing a higher education overseas and seeking employment opportunities that become open for them. Asserting their subjectivity and exercising their agency, many Saudi women have made it to the top tiers in government that were once monopolized by men. One of the biggest wins for Saudi women was the 2001 "identity card" law that liberated women, to some extent, from the patriarchy of the society. Sakr (2008) explained that in young societies undergoing rapid changes, such as Saudi Arabia, women often become a national symbol: "these identifications, being selective reincarnations of particular visions of the past, are usually called traditions" (p. 388). Doubtlessly, Saudi women are struggling with the rapid changes brought on by modernity and globalization, on one hand, and the deep rooted traditional expectations that have led to the emergence of multiple identities on the other hand.

Part and parcel with the schizophrenic effect is the issue of Saudi identity. The controversy in defining the Saudi identity stems from the difficulty in pinpointing the basis. Doubtlessly, Islam is the primary source of identity in Saudi



Arabia as well as Arabic, history, and tribal affiliations. Ochsenwald (1981), in an attempt to understand the Saudi identity, demonstrated that it is as much religious as national. Johnston (2003) posited that “beliefs about religion are among the most profoundly significant parts of identity” (p.89), because they emanate from what touches “the foundation” of oneself”. Al-Abed Al-Haq and Smadi (1996a) elaborated on that point, postulating that Saudi identity is comprised of two elements: “nationalism (at the KSA level) and nationalism (at the Arab level)” (p. 309). Regarding Saudi identity, “the collective identity of most Muslim Arabs of the Middle East incorporates three elements: the Islamic, the Arab and in the narrow, local sense, the national (which still consists of traditional factors such as tribe, extended family or geographical region)” (Nevo, 1998, p. 34). The dilemma in defining the Saudi identity stems, in my opinion, from the issues of the diminishing role of religion as a significant marker of identity, the prominence of the tribe in identifying oneself, the sectarian division in the society between Sunnis and Shiite, and the effects of globalization and the socio-economic advancements being witnessed by the Saudi society. Thus, my genuine belief is that the Saudis, at least those who I have met in Canada and Saudi Arabia, prefer to identify themselves as Saudis instead of a tri-element identity as proposed earlier.

The third element of the schizophrenic effect is related to the status of English in Saudi Arabia. The globalization and modernization of Saudi Arabia has led to an influx in the number of Saudis who learn English. The status of English in Saudi Arabia created two responses among the scholars and the population. The first response is represented by the stream that sees English as “loaded with political, religious, social, and economic overtones” (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p. 128), which calls for cautiousness and creates a fear that the Saudi culture and identity (in addition to the country’s L1, Arabic) will erode. Al-Abed Al-Haq and Smadi (1996a) succinctly captured this sentiment by arguing that the use of English in Saudi Arabia “entails Westernization, detachment of the country, and a source of corruption to their religious commitment” (p. 307). The second stream, represented by the explicit promulgation of English in the Saudi educational system, sees learning English as an empowering tool that will give those who master it access to otherwise unattainable powers and privileges (Bhatt, 2001). Although several studies have looked at the history of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia,

few studies have looked at the status of English in Saudi Arabia as the *structure* within which learners exercise their *agency*. In addition, a recent news article published by the *Saudi Gazette* (2012) mentioned that “Young women represent 60 percent of Saudis joining English language institutes across the Kingdom. Experts and investors in the field expect the number of such institutes to double over the next few years.” Spolsky (2004) cited Conrad (1996) as saying: “learning a language increased the *power* of the learner, and it was this quest for empowerment that accounted for the enormous growth in demand for proficiency in English” (p. 85). This comment, espoused with the aforementioned quote could serve as an indication of the strong desire of Saudi women to build a bilingual identity since “learning transforms who we are and what we can do,” which could be interpreted as “an experience of identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 215).

This study investigates the relational nature of language learning and the identity negotiation of 12 Saudi women, who are studying English in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, this study strives to uncover the opportunities of agency available for the women to better understand their investment in learning English as a foreign language.

### **1.3 Aims of the Study**

The learning of a second language is not simply a skill that is acquired with hard work and dedication, but a complex social practice that engages the identities of language learners in ways that have received little attention in the field of SLA (Norton, 2000, p. 132).

For the past 30 years, researchers in the field of second language acquisition (e.g., Block, 2007a; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000) have emphasized the need to integrate the language learner and the language learning context to analyze relations of power and understand how they affect the language learner, the language learning processes, and the learner’s identities. Several researchers (McKay & Wong, 1996; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Vitanova, 2005) have studied the connections between language learning, identity, and agency. The participants in these studies were immigrants from Eastern Europe, Asia, or Africa living in the US, Canada, and Australia. The studies were primarily concerned with interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers of the target language, and the social contexts in which the interactions took place.

Gu (2010) noted that “relatively few studies of English as a foreign language (EFL) [and the] learners’ identity construction in their homeland contexts” (p. 140) have been undertaken. Gao, Li and Li (2002) explained that EFL contexts lack the target culture exposure; and hence, deep issues of identity are either irrelevant or not feasible for empirical studies. Likewise, Block (2007a), in an extensive review of L2 identity research, concluded that “the prospects of TL-mediated subject positions in the FL context are minimal to non-existent” (p. 137). Vasilopoulos (2015) stated that, to date, “research into identity shifts and identity construction in the EFL context is sparse” (p. 64) and quoted Qu (2005) in highlighting that the limited research in this arena stems from the “ongoing controversies about the legitimacy and significance of foreign language learner-identity construction” (p. 64). The present study is an attempt to bridge the gap in that particular research context (EFL), and show that despite the absence of target language and culture exposure, EFL contexts can be empirically feasible contexts of study.

One of the problematic concepts in the relationship between language learning and identity is the relationship between language learning and women. Several studies have indicated that learning English for women in several parts of the world is considered to be learning a language of empowerment that offers them entry to places that had been restricted, and gives them access to otherwise unattainable symbolic and material powers. Moreover, English was seen as a means to liberate women from the confines of gender patriarchy (e.g., Corson, 2001; Goldstein, 1995, 2001; Kouritzin, 2000; Norton, 2000). Other studies have shown that women can be constrained by many gatekeepers that would restrict their access to English classes (e.g., Kouritzin, 2000).

While van Lier (2008) declared that successful language learning depends crucially on the activity and initiative of the learner (p. 163), the activity and initiative should be contingent on a personal sense of agency – the belief that their action will make a difference. This study aims at investigating the agency of Saudi women English learners in the context of Saudi Arabia to uncover whether or not all second/foreign language learners learn a language with the hope and desires exemplified in the economic metaphor extended by Norton (2000) and others, and to uncover the relational nature between learning a foreign language and identity. In addition, this study aims at discussing the opportunities of agency available to

the Saudi women in the context of EFL. In doing so, the study is intended to contribute to the body of research by shedding more light on the Arab world context in general and the Saudi context in particular. The motive behind this study is based on Joseph's (2004) observation:

any study of language needs to take consideration of identity if it is to be full and rich and meaningful, because identity is itself at the very heart of what language is about, how it operates, why and how it came into existence and evolved as it did, how it is learned and how it is used, every day, by every user, every time it is used (p. 224).

The present study aims to fill the gap in the Arab world literature, and account for the factors that shape the relationship between learning English as a foreign language on one hand, and identity and agency negotiation on the other hand.

To fulfill these aims, the study will address the following questions:

1. What are female Saudi EFL learners' views regarding the status of English in Saudi Arabia in general, and the status of English as it relates to Saudi women?
2. What are the discourses of investment in learning English as a foreign language by Saudi women?
3. How are the identities of Saudi women learners affected by their choice to learn English?
4. What opportunities are available for the women to exercise agency as they are learning English in Saudi Arabia?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The study of identity of women learners in Saudi Arabia differs markedly from the existing body of research that is focused predominantly on the ESL context. Previous studies investigating the connections between language learning, identity, and agency have targeted participants from various immigrant groups (Asians, Eastern Europeans, Africans) in different inner circle countries such as Canada, the US, and Australia. Nevertheless, few studies have examined how adult language learners negotiate their identities and agencies in countries in the expanding circle (where English is taught as a foreign language), such as Saudi Arabia. Moreover, most studies have focused on the identity negotiation of research subjects who need to communicate in the target language (TL) to survive

and guarantee access to the target community. The current study is unique in the sense that the participants are not operating under that premise, for the first language of the country is most prevalent and individuals can survive without needing to speak English.

In addition, a plethora of sociolinguistic profiles of English in expanding circle countries have thoroughly described the spread of English and its effect on native language, culture, and identities. Nevertheless, few studies have referred to Arab countries in general, and Saudi Arabia, specifically. Most of the studies mentioned in this thesis depend heavily on Western concepts and examples of identity construction, while studies referring to Arab local contexts are almost non-existent. This research is significant in the sense that it attempts to contribute to formulating a more comprehensive view of the complex social, linguistic, political, and gender forces that are involved in the process of language learning and identity and agency negotiation in an Arab expanding circle country such as Saudi Arabia.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the relationship between language learning, identity, and human agency using socio-cultural and poststructuralist conceptual frameworks. The research is much needed given the growing importance of issues of identity and agency in SLA and considering that the identity negotiations of Arab women English language learners have not received enough attention, especially with regards to Saudi women. This study also has pedagogical implications, especially for ESL programs in community centers, because teachers will be better able to serve their women students if they understand the experiences and rationales behind learning English, and how such experiences shape the identities and agency negotiations of learners and their investment in learning the language.

This study is also significant not only because it tackles the paucity of research that investigates Saudi women identities and sense of agency in Saudi Arabia, but because it also uses Islamic feminism as a theoretical underpinning; a matter most research in the MENA region neglect or fail to apply.

In addition to the previously mentioned, this study is considered to be significant given the position and gender of the researcher. Asweel (2013), a Saudi female researcher claimed that nobody understands the situation of a Saudi woman like another Saudi woman. However, my insider-outsider position as an

expatriate male researcher living and working in Saudi Arabia, I found that my position was a great facilitator for me in the process of data collection and analysis. The participants were not threatened by my gender; on the contrary, they considered it an opportunity to open up about the hegemonic practices of the Saudi male society. The significance of my position helped me in capturing, documenting and analyzing the data; and to present different views to the extracted data and discussion.

### 1.5 Chapters of the Study

This thesis is divided into seven chapters as follows:

**Chapter 1** includes an introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, the significance of the study, and the research aims and questions.

**Chapter 2** briefly describes the context of the study; i.e., Saudi Arabia, and the population of the study, the Saudi women. This chapter informs readers about the participants of the study and the academic, cultural, religious, and political factors that have shaped their experiences; in addition to a brief overview of foreign language teaching in Saudi Arabia.

**Chapter 3** discusses the theoretical framework that will guide the study and provides succinct definitions of the conceptual framework for the three main notions: identity, agency, and gender. It also critically engages with literature pertaining to language learning, identity, and gender; the intersectionality of language, religion and identity; gender and language; and literature pertaining to the Saudi Arabian context.

**Chapter 4** explains the methodological assumptions and the philosophical standpoints that underpin the choice of methods used in the study. It also gives a detailed account of the study design, methods of data collection, data analysis, and participants. The chapter outlines the ethical issues and guidelines followed in all stages of the research and acknowledges the study limitations.

**Chapter 5** analyzes and reports the findings of the study by focusing on individual participants. The findings are supported by data gathered from questionnaires and interviews.

**Chapter 6** provides an in-depth discussion of the major findings that are derived from the previous chapter. These are discussed in the light of existing literature.

**Chapter 7** assesses the implications of, and provides recommendations for the various stakeholders involved in the teaching of English in general and to Saudi women in particular. It also indicates areas for further research and limitations of the study.

## **1.6 Summary of Chapter 1**

In an attempt to set the scene and position for the study within the broader sociocultural and poststructuralist contexts, this chapter started with a brief account of the current situation of English in Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis the position of Saudi women, and explored the gap in the relevant literature in that area and the global EFL contexts. The chapter highlighted the need for the current study, which examines the relationship between acquiring English and the impact on Saudi women's identity and their sense of agency in Saudi Arabia. In addition to framing the research problem, the chapter presented the aims of the research and its salient questions. This was followed by an explanation of the significance of the study as well as an overview of the thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Context of the Study**

### **2.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

The aim of this chapter is to present background information for the context of the study. The chapter is divided into three parts: 1) a brief look at Saudi Arabia, demographics, the role of religion in the country, and the most dominant sociocultural norms; 2) discussion of the status and role of Saudi women with a discussion on the position of Saudi women in society, women's education, Saudi women's professional participation in Saudi Arabia, and the gains being made by Saudi women in the past few years; and 3) brief discussion on the history of foreign language teaching in Saudi Arabia.

### **2.2 Saudi Arabia: A Brief Look**

#### **2.2.1 An overview.**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 by King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud. The Kingdom is a vast desert peninsula located in Southeast Asia. The country covers more than 2,000,000 square meters (CIA World Factbook, 2014), which makes Saudi Arabia the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. The Kingdom lies in a strategic point where Africa and Asia meet. Saudi Arabia is bounded by the Arabian Gulf on the east, The Red Sea on the west, and Yemen on the south.

The population of Saudi Arabia is more than 31 million, of which 20 million are Saudi nationals, sharing Islam and Arabic. The remaining 11 million are expatriates who work in various fields in the Kingdom, and who come from various countries (Saudi Arabian General Authority of Statistics, 2016). The numbers of males and females is almost equally balanced, and a striking feature of the population is that only 3% of the population is older than 65 years, and most are between the ages of 15 and 54 (CIA Factbook, 2014). Most Saudis have descended from indigenous Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Qahtani and Ghamdi tribes. Other ethnic populations originated from Muslims from other countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and China who came to Meccas as pilgrims and stayed. The Arabs of Saudi Arabia are distinguished not by



racial factors, but by tribal affiliation for the most part. Contrary to misconceptions by mainstream Western media and observers that the country is a traditional society, 21<sup>st</sup> century Saudi Arabia is a multifaceted combination of traditions and modernity.

### **2.2.2 The role of religion in Saudi Arabia**

Islam and Saudi Arabia are closely intertwined making it difficult to consider one without the other. Many scholars have commented on this close-knit relationship between Islam and the Kingdom. Denman and Hilal (2011), for example, explained that “the Islamic religion is considered as much a part of the Saudi identity as the country’s longstanding history as part of the greater Arab Peninsula” (p. 304), and Ochsenwald (1981) wrote: “In Saudi Arabia from its inception Islam has been the omnipresent and dominant factor in public life” (p. 274).

Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most conservative and orthodox Muslim societies in the world. In fact, Saudi Arabia is the only Arab theocratic country where Islam is greatly intertwined with the government. The literature abounds with references to *Wahhabism* as the doctrine of Islam in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism is a term used by different people to denote different ideas and specific reasons. Wahhabism is understood in two different ways. The first is usually pejorative, often intended as a slur. In that sense, Beydoun (2011) defined Wahhabism as a “textual interpretation hallmarked by its intolerance for other Islamic traditions and modernity” (p. 81).

Opposite to the image of Wahhabism as a deviant attempt to alter Islam (Oliver, 2004) it is thought of as a movement that brought the Arabs of the Peninsula back to monotheism, after paganism was omnipresent in the region. Scholars such as Delong-bas (2004) and Curtis (2010) believed that Wahhabism is a major reform movement in Saudi Arabia. Curtis (2010) and Zarabozo (2003) explained that the term Wahhabi was first used by outsiders, in particular, opponents of Ibn Abdul-Wahhab *dawa*<sup>1</sup> to isolate his interpretation of Islam from other forms, and to denigrate his followers on the basis that they were considered

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<sup>1</sup> Dawa in Arabic means the “The Call of Islam”.

followers not of Islam, but of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself. The term that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab preferred to use was *muwahiddun*<sup>2</sup> (Curtis, 2010, p. 571; Zarabozo, 2003, p.157).

Within Saudi Arabia, various political, social and economic factors have yielded three religious mainstreams: Islamic hardliners, pragmatic conservatives, and liberals. Alhargan (2012) defined the Islamic hardliners as “those who adopt religious views that are not entirely based on original Islamic texts, and principles [that] can be obstacles to the advancement of women’s rights” (p.131). Haas (2014) explained that hardliners also tend not to support religious minorities’ rights. Pragmatic conservatives who, according to Sahly (2016), are more educated than the hardliners and hold advanced degrees in Islamic jurisprudence share the objectives of the hardliners; i.e., building a state based on Islamic law, but with a pragmatic sense. They push for creating modern and strong economies and communities; within the confines of Islamic law. Members of this mainstream are usually found in the *Council of Senior Scholars*. The third mainstream is the Islamo-liberal that rose from Western liberalism and moderate religious leaders. Their efforts are focused on promoting societal reforms, egalitarian gender relations, recognition of rights, and representing the moderate Islam (Alhargan, 2012; Lacroix, 2004; Haas, 2014).

Saudi Arabia that once adopted Wahhabi teachings beyond its theological nature to become the official and only basis for laws and conduct is now moderate Saudi Arabia. It took many steps in the direction of diminishing extremism and promoting moderation by appointing moderate scholars in the Council of Senior Scholars, easing the sex segregation rules in public places, and reconsidering the legal guardianship issue, though it still bans women from driving.

### **2.2.3 Sociocultural norms in Saudi Arabia.**

Modern Saudi Arabia consists of four distinct regions: Hejaz, Najd, parts of Eastern Arabia (Al-Ahsa), and Southern Arabia (Asir), with each region enjoying a distinct regional variety of cultural practices. Nevertheless, the Saudi culture is mostly uniform and largely embraced by all Saudis. Islam plays a central role in

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<sup>2</sup> *Muwahiddun* means monotheists or Unitarians.

defining the culture and determining the norms, values, attitudes, and practices of society (Almunajjed, 1997; Al-Saggaf, 2004). The trio of tribal systems, adherence to religion, and modernization appears to define the culture in Saudi Arabia, and consequently, the practices, privileges, and social norms.

Gender segregation is a prominent feature of the Saudi culture, though things are less strict than they were before. Several authors and historical accounts suggest that the exclusion of women from the public sphere is not part of Islamic teachings. Rather, gender segregation is suggested to have been introduced through Wahhabism (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Lopez, 2013). Meijer (2010) supported Al-Rasheed (2013), arguing that gender segregation is a sociocultural tradition in Saudi Arabia, not an Islamic requirement. Lopez (2013) explained that gender segregation began with the birth of the Kingdom, and was enforced to protect individual honor. According to this cultural norm, men and women work separately with a minimum of encounters between them. In recent years; however, a shift has occurred away from this norm. Many companies, like Saudi Aramco for example, do not segregate men from women, and both genders work together in the same workplace, sharing the same floor. In addition, some educational institutions, like King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST), and medical schools like the one in King Saud University, began operating with a co-ed principle.

The tribal and kinship systems in Saudi Arabia are omnipresent. Family ties and tribes are considered integral components of one's social face and identity. One's name and family name in Saudi Arabia are of great importance, and generally, citizens work hard to avoid any stigma that could be attached to their family name.

The Saudi society, like other societies, is divided into two main domains: public and private. Almunajjed (1997) explained that the public domain is the domain of the men, and economic, political, and religious activities are generally associated with men. In contrast, women belong to the private domain, which is associated with home and family members. As a result, Saudi Arabia families raise women to be modest, pious, and shy, with the belief that women are better off in their homes. In doing so, Saudi Arabia families believe they are protecting the

honor of the women. The men, in contrast, are raised to be religiously pious, but aggressive, tough, and independent.

## 2.3 Women in Saudi Arabia

In recent years, no aspect of Saudi Arabian society has been subject to more scrutiny and debate than the women's domain. Women's rights and responsibilities have been controversial issues among both conservatives and progressives in Saudi Arabia (Hamdan, 2005). Issues of women's role in society and parity between men and women in Saudi society are among the most discussed issues. Doumato (2010) noted that:

A healthy majority of Saudi citizens agree with the social agenda of the ulema,<sup>3</sup> and would not view the inequalities between men and women as discrimination, but as equivalent – a balance between the rights and duties of men and women as prescribed in Islam and necessary to uphold honor and family values (p. 425).

Littrel and Bertsch (2013) categorize Saudi Arabia as a *patriarchal belt society*, where the law reinforces discrimination against females by limiting their freedoms. Littrel and Bertsch (2013) succinctly capture the sociocultural nature of Saudi Arabia:

Societal practices institutionalise negative discrimination concerning women, often codified in laws that prohibit women from participating in much of public life or fully competing in the labour market ... The patriarchal belt is characterised by extremely restrictive codes of behaviour for women, such as the practice of rigid gender segregation and a powerful ideology linking family honour to female virtue. Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honour through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection, restriction, and dependence of women (p. 313).

### 2.3.1 The position of Saudi women in society.

Islam and Prophet Mohammed have, on several occasions, elevated and raised women's status among Arab tribes (Almunajjed, 1997). Although Islam does not grant men and women the same rights, this does not mean that it favors a

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<sup>3</sup> Ulema is the plural of Alem, which refers to the Shari'a scholars who refer to the Quran and the Prophet's saying and history to legislate laws and decide on what is or is not religiously acceptable.

specific gender. Each gender has its own special role to play, and both are treated with the same rewards and punishments from Allah. Nevertheless, the Wahhabi interpretation of sharia's law, championing tribal patriarchal stances, curtails many Saudi women's rights. Mtango (2004) highlights that:

Women in Saudi Arabia can be seen to be in a position subservient to men as restrictions are strictly applied. These restrictions are often explained by reference to Islamic requirements, but the Quran and other sources of Islamic law do not necessarily support the interpretations of the law the Saudi authorities apply (p. 49).

Desphande (2001) corroborates Mtango's remarks, noting that

[O]f all the other Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia has always been the most conservative. The women in this country have been the most guarded. The law has always been the most severe and has placed the most limits on women (p.193-194).

On the other hand, according to Delong-Bas (2004), the wrong interpretation of real Wahhabi views may occur, in regards to the position and role of women in Islam. Delong-Bas (2004) argued that the stereotypical opinions were the result of not distinguishing between tribal customs, local traditions, and Islamic law on one hand, and the lack of systematic interpretation and understanding of Muhammed Ibn Abudul-Wahhab's real message (p.123). Delong-Bas argued that Ibn Abdul-Wahhab:

Like Muhammed, ...sought to ensure that women's rights, as granted by the Quran, were implemented and that women were aware of them... His interactions with women indicate that he recognized them as human beings capable of serving as positive, active agents in both the private and public realms and who therefore deserved access to both education and public space (p.125).

Nevertheless, in Saudi Arabia, women's roles are prescribed to them by society. Yamani (2000) explained that "although interpretations of 'correct' Islamic behavior influence all sections of society, local customs, norms and tribal traditions actually dictate women's roles and are enforced through familial structures" (p. 96). Le Renard (2008) pointed out that since Saudi Arabia is seen as the birthplace of Islam, women should represent the virtuous image. Thus, the state laws and rules concerning women have contributed to defining Saudi women as pious, modest, and devoted to family (Le Renard, 2008, p. 613). The state created an image of an

“ideal woman,” which was used later as a national symbol. Deo (2006) stipulated that women are seen as “bearers of their cultural traditions,” so that “Defining women would allow a nation to define itself” (p.106). Yamani (2005) explained that the state has used women’s symbolic gesture to confirm its commitment to Islamic teachings; and therefore, strengthen its image as the birthplace of Islam.

Saudi women are considered as an extension of their male guardians and should always be under a *mahram* (legal male guardian). The identity of Saudi women first appears in relation to their father’s family. Later, when a woman marries, she will be added to her husband. In case of a woman’s father’s or husband’s death, the woman’s eldest son or the male next of kin becomes her legal guardian. This practice perpetuated Saudi women as minors.

According to Yamani (2000), “The new generation... is aware of its capabilities, and this inevitably leads to the questioning of some norms and social rules” (p. 69). In his news article, “Saudi Arabia’s feminist revolution has begun,” Keyes (2013) highlighted that many Saudi women began pursuing their individual rights to participate in changing the social restrictions. The Saudi feminist movement proved effective in changing the “status quo” of Saudi women, and for example, in 2001, Saudi women won the right to obtain ID cards, which gave them an identity that was separate from their male guardian. In 2007, the long-standing ban on women checking into hotels alone was lifted. The biggest win came in 2011, during late King Abdullah’s reign, when he addressed the Shura Council<sup>4</sup> saying, “We refuse to marginalize the role of women in Saudi society,” and he declared that women will be allowed to run for office or be appointed to the Shura Council (Alarabiyah, 2011). By 2013, 30 Saudi women had joined the once all-male Shura Council, and in 2015, Saudi women exercised their right to vote for the first time in the history of the Kingdom.

### **2.3.2 Education of Saudi women.**

They have to understand that nations cannot be civilized without educating women...Only with education can a woman contribute to her family and nation. Educated girls become good citizens who serve their

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<sup>4</sup> Shura Council is similar to the US congress. It has 150 members, half being elected and the other half being appointed by the King of Saudi Arabia.

nation with their work<sup>5</sup> (Sarah Bu Humaid, 1962 as cited in Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 94).

Women's education in Saudi Arabia has always occupied a contentious center in the conflict between traditional and modern ways of life, among religious scholars, family expectations, and the state (Yamani, 2000; Coleman, 2013). Formal education of women in Saudi Arabia has a relatively short history, beginning in 1960 with the establishment of the first authorized primary school for girls in Riyadh (Almunajjed, 1997). Prior to 1960, formal, state-provided education to females was nonexistent, and any education was generally faith-centered (Hamdan, 2005). The purpose of female education in that era was to produce righteous wives and mothers. Formal education for girls was officially organized in 1960 when King Faisal announced in a speech that upon the *Ulema's* blessing, schools for girls would open under the Department of Religious Guidance, which was replaced the same year by the General Presidency of Female Education (GPFE). Girls' education in Saudi Arabia remained in the hands of the Department of Religious Guidance (rather than the Ministry of Education) until 2003, when it was amalgamated with the Ministry of Education as a result of a tragic incident that involved a fire at a girls' school in Mecca that claimed the lives of 15 girls.

Higher education for women started in 1962 at King Saud University through a special program called ENTSA<sup>6</sup> (Alhareth, Al Dighrir, & Alhareth, 2015), where the education was off-campus, except for exams. Since that time, more and more institutes began allowing women to join, such as King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. Currently, most of the 25 universities, public and private, accept women, except for King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dhahran and the Islamic University in Madinah (Almunajjed, 2009). One of the milestones in women's education was the establishment of Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman University that has a capacity for 40,000 women students. Islam (2014) explained that the Saudi government's commitment to educating females in Saudi Arabia has

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Bu Humaid wrote the article, "La tamnau Al-ilm an fatayatekon" (Do not deprive your girls of education) in the Okaz newspaper in 1962 as a response to the Buraydah (city near Riyadh) uprising against opening female schools.

<sup>6</sup> ENTSA<sup>6</sup> is Arabic for (Distance learning) where students do not have to attend physically at the college.

led to a staggering number of matriculated girls, surpassing the number of matriculated boys. The World Bank reports that the percentage of literacy among females (ages 15-24) in Saudi Arabia in 2013 was 99%. Another avenue for the education of Saudi women is the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). According to statistics from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education online, the percentage of Saudi females studying abroad was (24.80%). In the same report, women represented only 15% of the enrolments in bachelor-level courses, but their engagement in graduate courses was much higher (approaching half of all enrolments at the masters level) (Saudi Arabian MoHE, 2013). Doumato (2010) commented that “Higher education, in fact, is one area in which women have significantly out-performed men in terms of PhD degrees earned” (p. 426). Interestingly, for years, Saudi women were not allowed to enroll in certain majors such as law, journalism, architecture, and engineering; however, that pattern has changed with the more than 300 women’s colleges in Saudi Arabia (Islam, 2015, p. 72).

Although the high level of women’s education in Saudi Arabia is a source of national pride, women’s education remains a source of anxiety and contention. Issues such as educating women, their major of study, their mode of school attendance, their behavior in the classroom, women studying abroad without *mahram*, and *Ikhtilat*<sup>7</sup> (co-education) are controversy matters and subject to negotiation among many stakeholders including the government, Wahhabi authorities, concerned families, and the women themselves.

### **2.3.3 Professional participation of Saudi women.**

Saudi Arabia has seen extraordinary development in the past decade. Saudi women are exhibiting a greater capability to handle both family and working responsibilities in a myriad of fields that were once monopolized by Saudi men. Jamjoom and Kelly (2013) explained the rise of Saudi women in public life that has forced the society to reconsider women’s position and face the new wave of change:

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<sup>7</sup> Ikhtilat is the Arabic word for (mingling), which refers to the coexistence of men and women at the same place. According to Wahhabis, Ikhtilat should not be allowed for it is the source of all evil.



The rise of Saudi women as a social power is considered across Arab society to be the most vital among social changes currently taking place. About 30 years ago, it was possible to describe Saudi Arabia as 'the society of men' because men monopolised professional work, as well as all kinds of political, economic and social authority. But now this image has started to change and women are carrying out important roles across all of these spheres. There are female doctors, female university lecturers and professors and female businesswomen. Today's Saudi women work in scientific laboratories, in the press and other media and in factories (p. 118).

Although Saudi women represent the majority of university graduates, women's participation in the labor market and public sphere is very low. Almunajjed (2010) showed that women represent 14.4% of the national workforce. Women's participation in the government sector is higher than in the private sector, where women tend to work in the fields of education, health, and social services (Almunajjed, 2010). Several explanations for the phenomenon have been offered. Ramady (2005) explained that the staggering number of enrolments in education by Saudi women is due to the greater employment opportunities in the field. Al-Hamid and Jamjoom (2009) corroborated Ramady's opinion, stating that "There was an urgent need for female graduates in education to work in the schools whose number were increasing day in and day out as a result of women's education" (p. 761). On the other hand, Almunajjed (2010) and Doumato (2010) highlighted that the reason for this pigeonholed employment phenomenon is related to sex segregation by occupation. Almunajjed (2010) explained that women are channeled towards certain professions because they are deemed, by society and concerned families, to be 'more feminine'. In fact, the Saudi Arabian Labor Law (2005), Article 149 blatantly states that women should occupy jobs that are "suitable to their nature," excluding jobs deemed "detrimental to health" and "likely to expose women to specific risks".

## **2.4 Historical Overview of Foreign Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia**

Mahboob and Elyas (2014), Elyas and Picard (2010), and Sofi (2015) traced the history of foreign languages in Saudi Arabia and the levels of acceptance of these languages. Their studies show that, historically, Turkish was the first foreign language to be taught, followed by French and English that were introduced into the newly established public secondary schools in grades 10-12 (Al-Abdulkader,

1978; Jan, 1984). In 1958, English was introduced in public intermediate schools (grades 7-9), and French remained in the curriculum at a secondary level until 1969, when the Ministry of Education decided to remove it from the curriculum (Jan, 1984). Al-Nafisah (2001) and Al-Seghayer (2005) discussed how the introduction of French and English created a sense of confusion around the circumstances that led the Saudi government to adopt such languages, which caused many educationalists to question the rationale and validity of such foreign language policies. On the surface, Saudi Arabia, as a Muslim Arab independent monarchy, was not colonized by either of the World's two most powerful countries at that time; namely France and Britain, as many Arab states had been (Al-Nafisah, 2001; Al-Seghayer, 2005).

The discovery of oil in 1938 and its various economic and political ramifications played an important role in the changing status of English in Saudi Arabia, creating an ambience of over-reliance on the language. Since then, Saudi Arabia has been a lucrative destination for foreign workers from the UK and the US. In addition to economic factors, Cordesman (2003) showed how English was closely linked to the military development of Saudi Arabia, with the American military advisors, trainers, and technicians working in the Kingdom since 1948.

## **2.5 Types of Language Institutes in Saudi Arabia**

Within Saudi Arabia, three main types of English language institutes are available for both sexes. The first type are the private commercial language institutes (e.g., British Council, Direct English, Wall Street, and New Horizon, to name a few). These institutes offer a wide array of courses ranging from short-term to long-term general, specialized, and test preparation courses. Most of these institutes offer English courses to Saudi women either in designated centers or at designated time slots. All of the courses delivered to women in these centers are offered by women English teachers. Male access to such institutes is very limited. Language centers in the Kingdom are supervised by the Saudi Ministry of Education. The second type of language institutes are the "in-house language training" institutes. Many of the multinational companies in Saudi Arabia, such as Saudi Aramco and SABIC, offer language training pertaining to the various needs of the company. Language courses in these institutes are open to both male and

female employees and in many cases are offered in a co-ed way. These language institutes are largely governed by the internal policies of the individual companies. The third and final type of language institutes are those belonging to higher education institutes. They are mostly found in “preparatory year deanships” across the Saudi universities. These language institutes cater to university students, and are run and supervised by their respective universities.

## **2.6 Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I have provided a glimpse into general information on Saudi Arabia as a country. Although Saudi Arabia is a young country, it has deep religious roots with a strong traditional and cultural history. In this chapter, the discussion of the status and position of Saudi women in the society, their education, and their professional participation in the country should provide readers with a greater understanding of the Saudi social structure, the history of women subjugation, and recent developments that took place in the country. This understanding is pivotal to comprehending how Saudi women’s roles and even identities are largely prescribed to them by the society and the Wahhabi doctrine. By delving into some details about Saudi Arabia and Saudi women, readers may gain a better understanding of the motivation for this study.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter describes the theoretical framework that will guide the study. I refer to the framework as *braided feminism* since it draws on three feminist traditions: poststructuralist feminism, intersectionality, and Islamic feminism. In addition, and before exploring the literature, this chapter succinctly defines the conceptual framework for the three key notions: identity, agency, and gender.

### 3.2 Braided Feminist Framework

The feminist project has never evolved into a unified body of thought, but is seen as “a multi-stranded project” (Coffey & Delamont, 2000, p. 5), representing a variety of feminist theories, feminist practices, and different feminist perspectives, which surface in feminism to more fully understand and explain the experiences of women and the politics of existing gender power relations in society (Macdonald, Kirk, Metzler, Nilges, Schempp & Wright, 2002, p. 145). The rationale behind “braided feminism” is that each of these feminisms use a different lens and have different underpinnings that are valuable in explaining some aspect of the topic, and all of the types of feminism could coagulate to account for women’s experiences. Dietz (2003) explained the diversified nature of feminism by arguing:

Thus, what really exists under the standard rubric of feminist theory is a multifaceted, discursively contentious field of inquiry that does not promise to resolve itself into programmatic consensus or converge onto any shared conceptual ground (p. 400).

#### 3.2.1 Feminist poststructuralism.

Scott (2003) argued that feminism needed a new theoretical lens to help its scholars think in “pluralities and diversities rather than unities and universals” (p. 378). According to English (2010, p. 712), feminist poststructuralism offers a “critique and careful examination of taken-for-granted notions of subjectivity and identity for women.”

Feminist poststructuralism is concerned with how particular discourses operate to normalize gender, which is considered a form of inequity by feminist poststructuralists (Blaise, 2005). Blaise (2005), while discussing the issue of

children, highlighted that researchers engage with feminist poststructuralism because it helps explain the gendered “construction and assumptions of identities, diversity and learning” (p. 3). The other foci of feminist poststructuralism are language, agency, gender, and power. While each concept and their relevance to this thesis are succinctly addressed, the concepts cannot be divorced from each other; they rely on each other for meaning-making. Language, discourse, and subjectivity are the three foci to be explored in detail in this thesis.

### **3.2.1.1 Language.**

Within poststructuralist theory, language is understood as the most powerful constitutive force shaping what we understand as possible and what we desire within those possibilities (Davies, 2000, p. 181).

Feminist poststructuralists hold that by examining language and how it services power, one can start to understand the power of language. Following Cameron (1992) and Weedon (1987), who adopted feminist poststructuralism, a greater understanding can be achieved of the role of language in producing gender relations; and at the same time, explain the role of gender dynamics in language learning and use. St. Pierre (2000) explained how feminist poststructuralism, based on Derrida’s work, sees the language shifting depending on the social context, time, and place. Thus, we can never know exactly what something means – we can never get to the bottom of things. By understanding this idea, neither language nor philosophy can ever be the same (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481-482).

Of particular interest to this thesis is the focus on language as a locus to social organization and as a form of symbolic capital<sup>8</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990, 2000). According to Weedon (1997),

language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed* (p. 21).

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<sup>8</sup> According to Bourdieu (1993), “‘Symbolic capital’ is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a ‘credit’ which under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic profit’ (p.75). Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes among three forms of symbolic capital: economic, cultural and social. In short, economic capital is money, cultural capital is control over the dominant culture and social capital refers to valuable social networks.

Within the Saudi context, a debate is being waged in regards to certain assigned labels, such as “woman,” “mahram,” and “sharia’a”. By investigating and recognizing the socially constructed and relational nature of these labels, certain assumptions can be challenged. Moreover, by adopting feminist poststructuralism, I echo Bourdieu’s (1977) claim that linguists are right to say that all languages are linguistically equal, and “they are wrong in thinking they are socially equal” (p. 652). In a precursor study I conducted for a Critical Issues in TESOL course, addressing the issue of Saudi women’s investment in English in Canada, one of the conclusions was concerned with the stratification power of newly acquired language among Saudi women in Canada and in Saudi Arabia. By recognizing the social nature of language, I strive to uncover how acquiring certain languages can help socially organize/stratify people. In addition, this thesis is concerned with uncovering the parts and varieties of language that are socially in demand, especially by Saudi women in Saudi Arabia.

### **3.2.1.2 Discourse.**

Language and discourse are intertwined. Gunn (2003) explained that discourse is “situated within language and practices” (p. 3) and Francis (2002) elaborated by defining discourse as “socially and culturally produced patterns of language, belief, and practice [which] develop over time” (p. 45).

I use the notion of discourse as explained by Read and Bartkowski (2000), where “discourses are not discrete ideologies; rather, they are culturally specific modes of understanding the world that intersect with competing viewpoints” (p. 398). In my introductory chapter, I spoke briefly about the Saudi “schizophrenic effect” and the existence of a myriad of competing discourses, like Norton (2013), who discussed that “one is often subject *of* a set of relations (i.e., in position of power) or subject *to* a set of relations (i.e., in a position of reduced power)” (p. 4, *italics in original*). It is quintessential, then, to mention that Saudi women have also been subject to power discourses, both internally (society, family, and sharia’a laws) and externally (Western and Orientalist discourses) that tended to portray them as helpless passive victims and perpetual minors who cannot act unassisted. Nevertheless, little research has considered the discourses of power that Saudi women have. By focusing on the issue of discourse, I hope to understand the world

of Saudi women though their rich plurality and voices; and by doing so, I hope to allow the competing discourses to interact. At the same time, I strive to refute the homogeneity of Saudi women, which is best represented by the term chosen by Albert Memmi (1967): “mark of the plural.”

### **3.2.1.3 Subjectivity.**

The understanding of language and discourse provides the backdrop for one of the important aspects of feminist poststructuralism: *subjectivity*. Weedon (1997) rejected the “humanist discourses [that] presuppose an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent” and argued for ‘subjectivities’ that she defined as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation in the world” (p. 32; Weedon, 2004, p.18). The relationships are also “precarious, contradictory, and in progress, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon, 1997, 2004). Subjectivity, in this sense, is coterminous with the notion of social identity, but not built in a vacuum as it is not unified and stable. Rather, it is constructed in a particular social context. In other words, subjectivities are not only non-unitary, but also “*necessarily contradictory*” [italics in original] (Davies, 2000, p. 57).

In this thesis I recognize the subjective world of human experience; and therefore, am interested in the individual accounts and stories of the participants. Poststructuralism is useful in this study because it challenges the unitary category of Saudi women, as seen by Western feminism and Orientalist thought, and seeks to understand the different experiences of Saudi women. At the same time, through the focus on discourse, this study attempts to understand which discourses are marginalizing, constraining, or empowering the Saudi women when learning English by paying special attention to their subject positions. I second Hafiz’s (2011) opinion:

Despite the critical impact of Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) on scholarship dealing with Muslim and Middle Eastern cultures, deeply seated assumptions surrounding Islamic practices and Islamic actors persist (p. 27).

I also share the same position as Jamal (2013) who explained that,

the linking of poststructuralism and Islam with gender is a cultural-political space from which to disrupt some deeply enriched teleological conceptions of history and subjectivity that continue to dominate social science research in many first-world academic institutions (p. 46).

### 3.2.2 Intersectionality.

Intersectionality was coined by the US lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), who was primarily focused on the discrimination witnessed by women of color in the US. In arguing her case, Crenshaw (1989) criticized what she called a *single-axis framework*, which was characterized by the “tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (p. 139). Crenshaw concluded that as long as race and gender are viewed as distinct and unrelated axes of difference that do not overlap, the experience of Black women will be misrepresented since the interaction of the multiple dimensions will remain unacknowledged. This single-axis framework, discussed by Crenshaw, is germane in nature to the idea in social science that differences are usually depicted as independent or additive with one dominant identity/social location (Donaldson & Jedwab, 2003), which explains the appearance of models of multiple identities. Rummens (2003) suggested that several additive models were used to describe identity, and that most of them failed to incorporate the relationships among the different social identities. The most ubiquitous notion in this arena is the *social identity*, which is used as a unifying concept. On one hand, it is used to refer to one’s self-definition; but on the other hand, it is used to define the individual in association with group identification. Intersectionality came to the foreground as the idea where social differences and distinctions are related, with a *simultaneous* impact on the lives of individuals.

The concept of intersectionality has made a significant contribution to feminist theory. According to McCall (2005), “intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies have made so far” (p. 1171). Furthermore, Davis (2008) defined intersectionality as

the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (p. 68).



Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) explained that intersectionality is a concept that makes visible “the multiple positionings that constitute everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (p. 187). In other words, intersectionality focuses on the individual’s social positioning at the intersection of a complex set of social relations.

In connecting intersectionality to professional transnational Muslim women of Turkish, Pakistani, and Indian heritage living and working in Britain, Mirza (2013) explained that

Intersectionality draws our attention to the ways in which identities, as subject positions, are not reducible to just one or two or three or even more dimensions layered onto each other in an additive or hierarchal way. Rather intersectionality refers to the converging and conterminous ways in which the differentiated and variable organizing logics of race, class, gender, religion, and belief structure the material conditions in which produce economic, social and political inequality in women’s real lived lives (p. 6).

Mirza (2013) not only explained the importance of intersectionality to feminist research, but managed to add an integral element to the discussion, which has long been considered among the “etc.”; i.e., religion. Weber (2015) stated that “feminist research has yet to adequately engage with the role of religion in intersectionality” (p. 22). Moreover, I believe that religion must be understood as being intertwined with other categories because the interrelationship among all of these categories shape identities. This is particularly important to my research since all Saudi women are Muslim; and religion is an integral part of who they are.

The importance of intersectionality in this particular research is that it helps us understand women’s different lived experiences and social realities in their various roles, especially in their post as language learners in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, intersectionality provides a flexibility for working within a matrix of complex layers of history and social systems. This is especially true in the context of Saudi women since their lives are shaped not only around their gender, but also their race, ethnicity, class, profession, and regional/tribal belonging. From the literature, a large degree of focus is on gender when discussing the issue of Saudi women, and factors such as race and ethnicity are set aside when other variables come into play, or when the role of religion is taken for granted. Within the context of Saudi

Arabia, gender, race, and class define power and access; and in this case, intersectionality can help illuminate how these factor affect Saudi women's experiences while learning English in Saudi Arabia. It can also help to identify which ones are most influential in shaping the women's identities and sense of agency. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) explained the usefulness of intersectionality as an analytic tool by arguing,

What makes an analysis intersectional ... is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power. This framing – conceiving of categories not as distinct but always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power – emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is (p. 785).

### **3.2.3 Islamic feminism.**

A critical premise of this thesis is that a Western feminist framework for understanding Muslim women is inadequate, and Anglo-American Western models of feminism should not be used as the lens for considering Western views or studies of Muslim women in general, or the issues of Saudi women in particular. Nevertheless, the concept of feminism in the West is a contested one and lacks consensus. The need to adopt an Islamic feminist lens stems from the need to consider Saudi women away from the decontextualized images circulating about them in the Western media and thought, and to refute the Orientalist stereotype of the Muslim woman as a passive victim and subject to continuous injustices because of Islam.

The notion of Islamic feminism has been under scrutiny since its inception. The notion faces challenges from two camps: the first contends that "Islam" and "feminism" are two polar terms and as such, Islamic feminism is an oxymoron. Haideh Moghissi (1999), one of the champions of this camp, asks "[h]ow could a religion which is based on gender hierarchy be adopted as the framework for struggle for gender democracy and women's equality with men?" (p.125) Likewise, Ebadi, who was the first Iranian and Muslim woman to win the Nobel Prize, disagreed with the notion of Islamic feminism based on the assumption that women's rights and feminism are universal concepts (Naili , 2013). The other camp, however, sees Islamic feminism as an important and relevant movement in

feminism as it critically reflects on Western feminism and the way it perceives Islam, Muslim women as non-Western *others*, and male hegemonic dominance. Badran (2009), an advocate of this camp argues that “Islamic Feminism advocates women’s rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic Discourse as its paramount discourse, though not necessarily its only one” (p. 246). In this thesis, I take a stand for Islamic feminism arguing that the opposing camp’s discourse is not geared towards discussing feminism or women’s rights, but rather to crusading to prove that Islam is misogynist, and that misogyny is at the root of women’s oppression.

I find it pivotal to clarify that the adjective “Islamic” used in Islamic feminism does not denote the “political Islam,” which can also be referred to as “Islamist”. Mir-Hossini and Tapper (2006) explained this by saying that when “Islamic” is attached to another “*ism*” it means finding inspiration and even legitimacy in Islamic history and textual resources. Thus, according to Badran (2009), Islamic feminism is “feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm” (p. 1). Mir-Hossini (2006) elaborated that Islamic feminism denotes

a new consciousness, a new way of thinking, a gender discourse that was feminist in its aspiration and demands, yet Islamic in its language and source of legitimacy (p. 640).

Islamic feminism does not seek to abolish Islam as the root cause of women’s injustice; rather, it argues that the solution to ensuring women’s justice and empowerment lies in re-interpreting the Quran, which is said to hold the principles of equality and justice. Islamic feminists believe that the current practices against women are the result of a corrupt patriarchal interpretation of the Quran, and societal practices and customs. Abou-Bakr (2011) captured the essence of the Islamic feminism project eloquently by reporting that Islamic feminism is

a continuous attempt to *un-interpret* [emphasis added] past gender biased readings done by male jurists and to offer alternative new perspectives towards justice and equality within Islam itself (p. 1).

I now shift my attention to Saudi Arabia, the context of this study, to highlight that within Saudi Arabia, two types of Islamic feminists can be found. The first, labelled by Al-Rasheed (2013) as *Liberal Islamists*, are described as:

Highly educated women who are critical of religious restrictions on their lives... some are liberal in their education and look. They subscribe to international discourse on gender and human rights. Their feminism is grounded in a cosmopolitan outlook... They do not see any contradiction between the global human rights discourse on gender and moderate Islam (p.135-36).

The other group, labelled “*modern Islamists*,” celebrate Islamic solutions to gender issues in Saudi Arabia and

situate emancipation within Islamic framework, and continue to invoke the Islamic tradition as an ideal source to draw on in order to gain more rights in Saudi society. Their reference is not global international discourse on gender equality, but ahistorical Islam... they see Islam as the framework that should guide their emancipation. They do not call for equality with men but for complementarity, as they see themselves contributing to society in specific ways that do not negate their identity as women (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p.136-37).

By adopting Islamic feminism in this thesis, I want to explore where Saudi women locate themselves vis-à-vis Islamic feminism, and to uncover the feminist and religious aspects of their identity. Moreover, the adoption of Islamic feminism will provide a voice against the essentialism of the Muslimwoman (Cooke, 2007). Moreover, I support Tohidi’s (2006) argument that Islamic feminism is an “inevitable and positive component of the ongoing change, reform, and development of Muslim societies as they face modernity” (p. 639). Nevertheless, I would like to highlight that my position echoes that of Moghissi (1999), in that the over emphasizing of Islamic feminism primarily serves the “the viewpoints of the regions’ Muslim female elites” (p. 146), and denies the non-Muslim women who are trying to voice their concerns in the same region. Given the non-existence of non-Muslim Saudis, I will not delve further into this discussion, but will simply say that my theoretical framework is mainly informed by Islamic feminism and also by some of the main tenets of poststructuralist feminism.

### **3.3 Conceptual Frameworks**

Before delving into the specificities of this study, I will illuminate the conceptual frameworks that guide the literature review.

### 3.3.1 Conceptual framework of identity

The literature abounds with terms and notions that refer to different aspects of identity. Such terms and notions include *'self'*, *'role'*, *'positioning'*, *'subject position'*, and *'subjectivity'* among many others. Luk (2008) focused on the foci of the terms to show how they differed: "self" is related to "an individual's feeling," "role" emphasizes "the more static, formal and ritualistic aspect of identity," and the terms "subject position" or "subjectivity" indicate "agency, conscious action, and authorship" (p. 122). Weedon's (1997) subjectivity is the word most associated with poststructuralism, and it is understood as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual," sense of oneself and ways of understanding one's relation in the world (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Some scholars adopt the notion of subjectivity and vow to differentiate it from the notion of identity. Gee (2000), for example, distinguished between 'subjectivity' and 'identity' by referring to the former as 'identity' that is more unstable and subject to change from moment to moment and context to context while the latter as 'core identity', which makes ourselves and others more static and consistent across contexts. In a similar fashion, Hall (2004) distinguished between subjectivity and identity by arguing that the former involves the 'self-reflexivity' and the latter does not. Nevertheless, other scholars, such as Morgan and Clarke (2011), used both terms interchangeably, suggesting that the terms may, but not necessarily, imply 'self-awareness' (Morgan & Clarke, 2011, p. 831).

In light of the previous discussion on the definition of identity, I see that Muslim identities (using the plural to elucidate that the Muslim Identity is not unified as proposed by Orientalist and Western schools of thought) are identities that have been constructed "based on their particular understanding of the tradition, which they subsequently deem as the best or most authentic" (Hughes, 2013, p. 9), and which include "a variety of political, social, gendered, economic, and intellectual forces" (Hughes, 2013, p. 10). I agree with Georzig and Al-Hashemi's (2015) definition that "a moderate Muslim is understood as an individual that has a Muslim identity next to other multiple identities" (p. 3), and Khan's (2002) conceptualization of Muslim identity as "heterogeneous and shifting" (p. xvi). Importantly, while my aim is to bring religion to the fore in this discussion of Islamic identity, I am in no

way insinuating that it is the sole component of the Saudi women's subjectivity. My focus is to discuss how religion intersects with various other components to create the individual identities of the Saudi women.

### **3.3.2 Conceptual framework of agency.**

Poststructuralism came to reconcile the *structure-agency* debate and poststructuralist scholars such as Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1984) vowed to show the dialectical relational nature of the 'structure' and 'agency', and the importance of considering both notions when trying to understand the social life and organization. Butler (2006) characterizes agency as a socially situated, culturally bound process. From the previous section, the identity of individuals are mostly shaped by historical and social contexts, and by extension, "Socially constructed selves are not dupes but agents who act and resist" (Hekman, 2013, p. 21). Moreover, people have agency that helps shape these social and historical contexts. Ahearn (2001, 2012) provisionally defined agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (2000, p. 112), though he also declared that this definition is not enough and it is just a starting point, calling for further interrogation to reach a more nuanced definition.

Part and parcel to the previously discussion is the issue of power. Giddens (1984) connected agency to the notion of power, because "to be a human is to be an agent... and to be an agent is to have power" (p. 9). Within this context, power implies the individual's ability to perform an intended act. Influenced by sociocultural theorists, Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981), the poststructuralist Foucault (1980, 1984) theorized about power relations, and Moje and Lewis (2007) conceptualized agency as the "strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded within relations of power" (p. 18).

Zimmerman (2014) explained that in Western feminist discourse, agency and choice with respect to religious women are associated with liberal concepts of emancipation, and religion is perceived as oppressive while modernity is attributed to secularism. Here, I reiterate my earlier position and refute the simplistic view of Muslim women as passive victims and one-dimensional characters who lack the agency to act, because of a false perception of religion. Muslim women, including

Saudi women, are indeed disempowered by the hegemonic male interpretation of the Quran and by the culture, though empowerment does not annihilate their agency at all. Kandiyoti (1989; cited in Shaheed, 1999, p. 62) declared that women in Muslim communities are “fully fledged actors” and their agency should be understood away from the oppositional agency. I believe that we should avoid using the secular prism of looking at Muslim women’s agency, just as we should stop perpetuating the idea that religion is the root cause of the lack of Muslim women’s agency. I also believe that Muslim women’s agency is enmeshed in the effects of language, knowledge, power, and history, with their race, ethnicity, gender, and religion.

In this thesis, I understand women’s agency to be based on two conceptualizations of the intersectionality between religion and agency. The first conceptualization comes from anthropologist Mahmood (2005) who developed the notion of *pious agency* while working with Muslim women in Egypt. Mahmood maintained that the Egyptian women with whom she worked demonstrated “nonliberal pious agency” (p. 38). Mahmood showed how Egyptian women conform to religious ideals and transform themselves into virtuous Muslim subjects, which is a type of agency that goes against the assumptions of Western feminism as I demonstrated earlier. Rachel Rinaldo’s (2014) *pious critical agency* brings the discussion of the intersectionality of religion and agency to a full circle. Rinaldo worked extensively with Muslim women in Indonesia and argued that Indonesian women, through activism, demonstrate pious critical agency that is “the capacity to engage critically and publically with religious texts.” Rinaldo (2014) contended that not only can Islam “be a resource for women’s agency but that religion and feminism can intersect in surprising and unexpected ways” (p. 825). Rinaldo argued that when women use critical Islamic discourses, they show that pious and feminist subjectivities can intersect and overlap, and that Islam is the source of activism and authority to those women.

Based on the above discussion, and for the purpose of this study, I propose that agency, including learner agency, is “socially oriented” (Toohey & Norton, 2003, p. 59), and it entails actions that arise from deliberation and choice (Allison & Huang, 2005). It also involves the “strategic making and remaking of selves,

identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools, and resources and histories, as embedded within relations of power” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18).

### 3.3.3 Conceptual framework of gender.

In this study, an understanding of gender must first be established before discussing any gender-related issues. My understanding of the construct of gender drew, in part, on the work of Judith Butler, especially her *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1999/2006), where dichotomies of gender and sex are scrutinized. Butler (2006) collapsed the sex/gender distinction to argue that gender “is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (p. 6). In other words, no sex exists that is not already gender. In addition, Butler (2006) postulated that bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence, so that nothing is called “natural body” (p. 25) pre-existing from cultural inscription; and gender is culturally imposed upon bodies to construct or reflect the social meanings and power hierarchies. Butler’s (2006) main argument, however, was that gender is not something one *is*, but rather what someone *does*; thus, it is “doing” rather than “being” (p. 25). Gender is not a product of genetics, but comprised of a set of repeated behaviors or performances. Butler (2006) elucidated this thought by arguing that gender is

the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal over time to produce the appearance, of a ‘natural’ kind of being (p. 33).

In simpler terms, Butler argued that sex is merely a biological description while gender is culturally constructed, which makes it more open to wider spectrums of interpretation. Nevertheless, she argued that the dominant assumption is that one’s gender will follow one’s sex because of powerful discourses within society. In her theory of *gender performativity*, Butler (2006) argued that gender is performative and the product of inherited discourses, which espouse certain roles and behaviors that in turn lead to uniform notions of masculine and feminine. This concept posits that gender is the outcome of acting and repetition, and it is constantly changing based on our actions. This means that gender is not completely free flowing, as the “rigid regulatory frame” sets limits and restrictions for the performance, and the subject is not free to choose which gender



he or she will enact. Further, Butler (2006) attested that “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (p. 34). Therefore, the ongoing performative acts contribute to the construction of gender and identity.

Within the Saudi context, the dominant discourse resists this Western conceptualization of gender performativity. Instead, the traditional perspective of gender that has been perpetuated through socio-historical discourses, patriarchy, and the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, still prevails. Saudi Arabia is not immune to the frantic wave of changes sweeping the Middle East and the world. More and more Saudi women are fighting the heteronormative regime that has been long sustained by a process of socialization, and refuse the assigned gendered role prescribed to them by their society. At least 17 Saudi women politicians won council seats in the country's first ever election that was open to women voters and candidates. For these odd success stories to prevail and become the norm; however, the dominant discourses of hierarchy and assigned gender roles need to be deconstructed and replaced.

### **3.4. Language Learning, Identity, and Gender**

A substantial body of literature clearly shows that language use has significant implications for an individual's sense of identity and subjectivity (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Most of these studies can be traced back to Pennycook's (1990) call for Critical Applied Linguistics (CALx) when discussing the need to clearly map “micro and macro relations, ways of understanding a relation between concepts of society, ideology, global capitalism, colonialism, education, gender, racism, sexuality, class, and classroom utterances, translations, conversations, genres, second language acquisition, and media texts” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 5). According to Pavlenko (2002), the work initiated new questions, new approaches, and new terminology that has been circulating in contemporary SLA research.

Weedon (1987) noted that “while different forms of poststructuralism vary in both their practice and in their political implications, they share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity” (p. 20). For the sake of this literature review, I use Weedon's (1987/1997) conception of poststructuralism,

which is defined as “a range of theoretical positions which address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed” (p. 20). At the heart of the paradigm is the view of language as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) and the site for identity construction (Weedon, 1987). The view of language learning is essentially social (Ochs, 1988) and language learners are seen to have multiple, dynamic, and fluid identities (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000), capable agents for reflecting on and seeking the creation of social arrangements that facilitate their aims in relation to language learning (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

Research on the relationship between language learning and identity is vast and it would be an extremely ambitious task to give a comprehensive overview of the literature in that regard. Yoshizawa (2010) stated that poststructuralists in the realm of SLA, for the past decade or so at least, have been busy trying to decipher what identity is, and how it relates to the wider concept of society. Most importantly, they have sought an understanding of how the relationship between the individual and the society affects his or her language learning process. Poststructuralists elucidated the concept that identity is a site of struggle (Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Pennycook (2001) explained that, based on Norton’s concept, “the person takes up different subject positions within different discourses, and language – or discourse – is a crucial element in the formation of subjectivity” (p. 148). In other words, subjectivity is produced in a variety of social sites, all of which are structured by relations of power in which the person takes up different subject positions that may be in conflict with each other.

For the past 30 years, researchers in the field of second language acquisition (e.g., Block, 2007a; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000) have emphasized the need to integrate the language learner and the language learning context, and analyze relations of power and how they affect the language learner, the language learning processes, and the learner’s identities. Several researchers (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; McKay & Wong, 1996; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Vitanova, 2005) have studied the connections between language learning, identity, and agency. The participants in these studies were immigrants from Eastern Europe, Asia, or Africa living in the US, Canada, and Australia. A plethora of studies have been conducted in this field; however, most have been concerned with younger learners

in school or university settings (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton & Gao, 2008; Trentman, 2013), and the primary focus tends to be on the conflict between the self-defined identity and the assigned identity that results from interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers of the target language. The other main focus in the studies has been on adult learning (e.g., Norton, 2000; Wharton & Eslami, 2015; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002), revealing the power relations that influenced/affected the learning process, and learners' identities. Despite their differences, both threads of research yielded similar results in that the divergent language practices of the young/adult learners lead to complex, multiple, and changeable identities according to the circumstances, and a myriad of powers try to position second language learners. McKay and Wong (1996) argued that researchers need to uncover how learners are "both positioned by the relation of power and resistant to positioning" (p. 579).

After reviewing many of these studies, I realized that the theoretical lenses being used to investigate the interplay between language and identity are useful in the particular contexts of the studies, and the situation is completely different in the foreign language context. Despite a burgeoning body of research focusing on language learning and identity construction, Taylor, Busse, Gagova, Marsden, and Roosken (2013) argued that "The link between foreign language learning and adolescent identity has not inspired much research to date" (p. 4). Yoshizawa (2010) and Taylor et al. (2013) argued that investigations of learners' identities in relation to language learning have been conducted in different contexts and with a variety of participants, mainly with a focus on English as a Second Language (ESL) among immigrants in English-speaking countries (e.g., Goldstein, 1997; Norton, 2000; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; McKay & Wong, 1996). In addition, a small number of studies have focused on contexts where the language (mainly English) is taught and learned as a foreign or additional language, and the participants in these studies are not immigrants, but citizens who study other languages in their homeland. For the sake of this thesis, I will adopt Block's (2003) definition of foreign language context:

The context of millions of primary school, secondary school, university and further education students around the world who rely on their time in

classroom to learn a language which is not the typical language of communication in their surrounding environment (p. 48).

In addition, most of the reviewed studies represent Western definitions of identity that are removed from any culture-specific criteria. It is safe to argue that in Muslim countries, in general, and in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), language and religion are considered as the bedrock of identity. One cannot venture into a study of Muslim women's identity and neglect the role of religion in their current and future identities.

#### **3.4.1 The intersectionality of language, religion and identity.**

A number of studies have investigated the relationship between language and identity that exists in predominantly Islamic countries. The studies explored the impact of English on the identities of participants, and recorded the participants' attitudes regarding the language. Importantly, an essentialist view of these Islamic states must be avoided as these countries are historically, culturally, and politically unique, though a number of common themes can be discerned.

A number of studies have contemplated the link between language, religion, and identity in the Muslim world, with a wide array of results. One strand of studies has shown how people resist English and associate the language with Christianity and/or Western values. In Malaysia, Mohd-Asraf (2005) and Kim (2003) reported that some of their participants resisted any identity that is based on proficiency in English, opting instead for Bahasa Malay whenever possible. Shaaban and Ghaith (2003); however, reported that in Lebanon, Christians showed a more positive attitude to English than did Muslims. In Lebanon, Joseph (2004) also found a great tendency among Lebanese to associate French with Christianity. Che Dan, Haroon, and Naysmith (1996) provided a clear example of the link between language, identity, and religion. The authors concluded that the participants perceive language as a "potent symbol of the culture of its users" and that "Their identity as Muslim Malay was strongly linked ... with their mother tongue, Bahasa Malay; and the language of their religion, Arabic" (p. 225). English, in the same study, was perceived as being heavily linked to Western culture and secularism, and was perceived as having a practical value that was removed from identity. Hashim (2004) studied the dualism of education in Malaysia and reported similar

findings that the introduction of English in Malaysia was not favored because the Malays fear that students would be converted to Christianity, and because Islamic teaching was omitted. Nevertheless, the competing discourses and various agendas attached to English as a foreign language must be acknowledged as some authors have disfavored English, and many others (e.g., Hashim, 2009; Dumanig, David & Symaco, 2012; Ali, 2013; Ha, Kho & Chng, 2013) call to strengthen the role of English in the society by giving it a more stable role while formally recognizing the role of English in modernizing and developing the nation.

In Turkey, where Islamic identities are reportedly prioritized, Atay and Ece (2009) reported a conflict in the identity of several of their participants. Although the study involved a small number of participants ( $n=34$ ), the results are significant and enlightening. The authors argued that the socio-cultural identities of Turkish EFL students have been compromised as a result of language acquisition, and even though the participants were well-aware of their multiple identities, they preferred their Turkish and Muslim identity over the Western version. The authors also found that English was perceived as having an economic and practical value. In the Saudi Arabian context, Al-Abed Al Haq and Smadi (1996a) conducted a cross-sectional study of 1,176 Saudis, based on what the authors described as a sense of fear among Saudis “that the use of English entails Westernization, and detachment from the country, and is a source of corruption to their religious commitment” (p. 308). The study results showed that the participants did not feel that using English would make them westernized or interfere with their religious commitment or patriotism. Despite the importance of these findings, it should be noted that they were completely quantitative, follow-up interviews were not used, and the sample did not represent Saudi society since it was comprised mainly of Saudi university students. The authors did not indicate whether or not Saudi women were represented. Elyas (2008) also corroborated the opinion that English in Saudi Arabia is not a threat to Saudi identity, arguing that

The Saudi students agree (for the most part) that both the study of the English language and its culture are necessary in order to develop their English comprehension. Thus, for these students English does not appear to be an indicator of an imperialistic purpose of Westernization of their Arabic identity (p. 45).

Badry (2011), who targeted a total of 105 Arab students (53 females), and Ronesi (2011), who conducted a small-scale study (10 Arab females, belonging to either one or more nationalities), both focused on the UAE context and revealed interesting findings in terms of the impact of learning English on Arab learners. Badry (2011, p. 102-103) indicated that 71% of the respondents reported that learning English did not create any change in their sense of having an Arab identity. Badry (2011) argued that “speaking the other’s language and adopting some of the other’s cultural artifacts does not necessarily lead to identifying with him or necessarily developing a positive attitude towards the West” (p. 104). This was corroborated by 62% of the respondents who perceived learning English as an instrument rather than as an identity changer. In Ronesi’s (2011) study, the women saw bilingualism as an expansion of their identity and agency (p.70), and bilingualism was considered an enriching rather than a diminishing factor. Nevertheless, the women felt strongly about their Arab identity, despite being immersed in English, and took drastic measures to maintain their Arabic, which they considered to be a major source of their identity. Like the participants in Badry’s (2011) study, the women here adopted English as an instrument to fight the parochial and stereotypes attached to Arab women.

The previous studies clearly highlight the intersectionality of religion, language, and identity, and how multiple discourses intersect and lead to tensions in the realization of one’s identity. Language and religion are two of the most important markers of identity in the Middle East. The studies show that the learners were motivated by their desire to gain some sort of advantage by learning English. At the same time, many of the studies support the idea that English can be seen as imparting linguistic and cultural imposition, which may exploit and corrupt the learner. The discourse of resistance to English is suggested by those who accuse English of being the bearer of Western and Christian ideologies that seek to de-Islamize the Muslim countries (Karmani, 2005).

Karmani (2005) critically evaluated the spread of English in the Gulf States, pronouncing it to be a form of colonization that was introduced to curtail Islamic extremism. Karmani (2005) showed that the Gulf States were split between two positions regarding English: the modernists who embrace the language, and the Islamists who reject it for being pregnant with Westernized values. Al Rabai (2014)

went even further and mentioned a fear for a post-Arab spring and new ruling regimes that would be primarily religion-centric, and would change the linguistic topography of the Middle East based on the assumption that English would be equated with Christianity. Besides the Muslim scholars who championed this discourse, critically-applied linguists, Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2004), following the publication of a paper by Agnieszka Tennant (2002) in *Christianity Today* that called upon Christian English teachers to sharpen their skills and credentials to gain the trust of more language learners, maximized the opportunity to spread their faith and coined the term *Teaching English as a Missionary Language (TEML)*. The discourse led to a proliferation of the fear of losing one's identity in a welter of alien values bound in English.

Jamjoom (2010) argued for the need to negotiate "the growing contradictions between societal practices and religious doctrine" (p. 56). I believe that if we alienate the Christian and Westernizing discourses, English can be instrumental in changing one's worldview and fostering an ideological shift. Said (2011) echoed this opinion saying that while language is not deterministic of one's worldview, it provides a socially constructed means to express ideas that are non-existent in other languages. In Pakistan, for example, Anbreen (2015) investigated the impact of learning English on 40 Pakistani women. In consonance with other studies, the author showed that learning English had a positive impact on the women's identity in terms of maturity of ideas where 67.5% of the respondents agreed that learning English gave them a completely new perspective. Likewise, Badry (2011) and Ronesi (2011) conducted studies in the UAE context, and found interesting results in terms of the impact of learning English on Arab learners. Badry (2011, p. 102-103) reported that 71% of the respondents reported that learning English did not create any change in their sense of having an Arab identity. Badry (2011) argued that "speaking the other's language and adopting some of the other's cultural artifacts does not necessarily lead to identifying with him or necessarily developing a positive attitude towards the West" (p. 104). This was supported by 62% of the respondents who perceived learning English as an instrument rather than an identity changer. The women in Ronesi's (2011) study saw bilingualism as an expansion of their identity and agency (p. 70), and that bilingualism is an enriching rather than a diminishing factor. Nevertheless, the women felt strongly about their

Arab identity, despite being immersed in English, and took drastic measures to maintain their Arabic, which they considered to be a major source of their identity. Like the participants in Badry's (2011) study, the women here adopted English as an instrument to fight the parochial and stereotyping that was attached to Arab women.

### **3.4.2 Gender and language.**

This thesis subscribes to the gender theory that is informed by the idea that gender intersects with other aspects of individual identity such as religion, race, and ethnicity (Burman, 2003; Valentine, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2007); and consequently, the intersectionality guides individual learning experiences, desires, and outcomes. In their comprehensive review on gender and language, several books, chapters, and encyclopedia entries (e.g., Pavlenko & Piller, 2008; Pavlenko, Blackledge, Piller & Teutsch-Dwyer, 2001; Piller & Pavlenko, 2001, 2007; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004) highlight various studies that have linked gender with different aspects of second language teaching and learning. Unlike the traditional research that proliferated during the 1970s, which was focused on gender as "binary opposition" (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001, p. 23); that is, gender as a variable, where the focus was on the differences between women's and men's language use and attempts were made to explain them through generalized features of gender relations, such as *deficit*, *dominance*, and *difference* (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001), this study attempted to break away from that and adopt Gal's (1991) perspective of gender as "a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women" (p. 176).

A quick online search of various databases using the keywords: "second/foreign language learning," "gender," and "Middle East" yields a good number of studies. Nevertheless, many studies, including contemporary ones, still use the variationist approach, with gender as a variable. Within the MENA context, studies by El-Dib (2004) in Kuwait, Kaylani (1996) in Jordan, Abu Shmais (2003) in Palestine, and Abu Radwan (2011) in Oman are all examples of studies that look at gender as a variable to explain an aspect of second language learning, such as motivation, difficulties, or strategies. Similarly, many studies within the Saudi



Arabia context (e.g., Al-Otaibi, 2004; Javid, Al-Asmari & Farroq, 2012; Daif-Allah, 2012; Alhaisoni, 2012; Alsamaani, 2012) looked at gender as a variable to explain many things pertaining to second/foreign language learning. In my opinion, all of these studies suffer from the essentialist fallacy where gender is perceived as a set of traits inside the person; turning a blind eye to the social, historical, and cultural dimensions of gender.

These studies were not focused on gender per se, but gender was considered when it was statistically significant. Such research reveals the tendency of many researchers in the MENA region to approach issues of gender with an a priori mindset, where gender is treated as being static and unproblematic. Consequently, these studies may have contributed to the *symbolic violence* against women in these regions.<sup>9</sup> In general, a single research paradigm does not seem to exist as a panacea for investigating the relationship between language and gender. Although the proposed braided feminist theoretical framework seems to be better suited for understanding the nature of gender in this study, gender still needs to be deconstructed while taking the local context into account.

Several studies have adopted the poststructuralist feminist approach in an attempt to understand the connection between gender and the various aspects of second/foreign language learning. Most of the research in this field is from studies of immigrant women to investigate how gender practices mediate the access of immigrant women to educational and interactional opportunities (e.g., Kouritzin, 2000; Goldstein, 1995; Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2000).

The view of English as a useful language for advancement, or as the language of modernity is not a new one, and the idea has been discussed in depth. French, for example, is perceived as the symbol of enlightenment, open-mindedness, and modernity in Morocco (Sadiqi, 2003; Ben Almustafa, 2014), and it is perceived as the key to better jobs and financial status. This likely led Laila, a housewife interviewed by Ben Almustafa (2014) to say “I urge my daughter to learn

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<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu (1998) defined **symbolic violence** as an imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning upon groups or classes, accepted as being legitimate. Symbolic violence is the unnoticed (partly unconscious) domination that people maintain in everyday living. Because symbolic violence is practiced and repeated in everyday life, people do not realize that certain acts or attitudes contain symbolic violence.

and master French because I care about her future profession” (p. 145). In Lebanon, Diab (2000) found that Lebanese women see the advantage of social prestige in learning English “for many females in Lebanon, speaking English well is also considered a status symbol, indicating a higher social class and a higher level of education” (p. 185). In the UAE, Hopkyns (2014) reported that 97% of the Emirati undergraduate women she interviewed said that English is an important language for them and for their future. The importance of English stemmed from the fact that it is the language of communication, and it is instrumental for them to find or keep their jobs. Although these studies are valuable in terms of highlighting how Muslim Arab women perceive English, they do not discuss the interplay between gender and language in their respective contexts, and they lack any discussion about the intersectionality of various factors.

In this part of the literature review, I focus on one of the most influential Arab and Muslim women scholars exploring the interplay between gender and language in an Arab and Muslim context (i.e., Morocco). Sadiqi’s (2003) studies are important to this thesis for three reasons. First, Sadiqi’s (2003) study is one of a few studies that investigated the interplay between language and gender in an Arab Muslim country. Not only did she investigate the interplay of EFL (French or English), but she also focused on variations of the native language (Arabic). Second, Sadiqi’s studies are clear examples of intersectionality. Sadiqi argued that language and gender in the case of Morocco are closely related to the women’s geographical origin, class, age, and level of education. Third, Sadiqi’s (2003) studies successfully portray how ‘liberal’ and ‘religious’ feminisms in Morocco relate to each other rather than to Western feminism.

In her discussion of the interaction between language and gender in Morocco, Sadiqi (2003) argued that the situation is based on “sites of power” in religion, politics, and law. She suggested that male domination in these arenas, and women’s exclusion has led to what she calls “sociolinguistic androcentricity,” which explains the cultural patriarchy of many Arab and Muslim countries where men occupy the public sphere and women occupy the private one. Sadiqi (2003) concluded that Arabic is “men’s language” whereas French is seen as “women’s language”. Sadiqi (2003) also pointed out that Standard Arabic (SA) is associated with the public sphere where the real exercise of power takes place, and where

men dominate. Vernacular Arabic, in contrast, takes place in the private sphere where women are marginalized. Relating her argument to religion, and SA being the language of the Quran, Sadiqi (2003) claimed that even though the Quranic SA is available for both men and women, men exercise greater power in this domain since most Quranic SA is the language used to practice religious rituals, which are usually performed by men in the public space. As for French, she argued that women are more inclined culturally to speak French because French is viewed as a sign of modernity and refinement, fitting to a woman. Walters (2011) investigated the ideologies of gendered French in Tunisia and corroborated Sadiqi's (2003) findings. The study also connected gender and language studies to nationalism, with a conclusion that women use French (Standard French) more than men do, which is considered a sign of inauthenticity of the Tunisian women: "not being Tunisian enough or being too French or European" (p.105). In contrast to other studies, the author reported that men's greater use of Arabic and heavy-accented French signaled their authenticity. In light of the previous discussion, I could not find any evidence in the burgeoning literature regarding the relationship between language (whether Arabic or English) and authenticity and nationalism in Saudi Arabia.

The intersectionality of gender, religion, and language learning was evident in the study by Rida and Milton (2001), investigating the reasons for 23 Muslim women in Australia to not access English classes to which they were legally entitled. The authors indicated two major (external and internal) reasons. At a clear intersection between gender, religion, and language learning, the women in the study indicated that accessibility to classes was an issue (in terms of timing and location) that could be improved if the classes were conducted at an Islamic center or mosque. Moreover, all 23 women indicated that single-sex classes would definitely improve the number of Muslim women that attended. The study also showed that for the "non-European Muslim women" who participated in the study, their cultural and religious affiliation hindered their chances to join the English classes. Another crucial reason mentioned was the unsympathetic husbands and/or other influential male figures who perceived the role of Muslim women to be at home in service of their husband and children. Although these findings somehow resonate with those of Kouritzin (2000) and Goldstein (1995), religion and religious

beliefs of Muslim women and their social network clearly intersect with gender and gender roles to either facilitate or impinge on women's access to linguistic resources and capital.

Stepping away from the MENA region, I also reviewed many other studies that discuss the question of gender and language learning. Most notably is Takahashi's (2013) critical ethnography about the desire of Japanese women for identity transformation and romance with White native speakers, through the mastery of English. Takahashi (2013) provided a rich critical view of how various components intersect to promote identity transformation. In the context of the study, these components were race, gender, identity, migration, discourse of 'Whiteness' used by companies promoting English courses, desire, and discourses of Western masculinity.

### **3.4.3 Saudi Arabian context.**

Speaking from an anthropological and historical standpoint, Al-Rasheed (2013) highlighted that in the literature of politics, history, and human rights, "Compared to other Muslim women ... Saudi women's gender issues remain the least studied" (p. 33). The same can be said about the gender issues of Saudi women in the fields of applied linguistics and second language learning. Most of the literature dealing with the impact of learning English either targets Saudi students (males and females) and paints them with the same brush (e.g., Girior, 2014; Barnawi, 2009; Shaw, 2010; Jaidev, 2011), or if targeting Saudi women, it is done within the framework of studying abroad or ESL contexts (Alsweel, 2013; Altamimi, 2014). Within the EFL context, most studies focus on the experiences of Saudi women from a quantitative standpoint, and adopt theories of motivation rather than poststructuralism. This paucity of literature is one of the motivations for this study.

In this section, I refer to studies that resemble this thesis, in terms of their theoretical framework. First, Jaidev (2011) investigated the strategies used by three Saudi students in Singapore (two males and one female) to deal with their fears and apprehensions as they were learning English. The main aim of the paper was to uncover how the students re-examined their social identities and embraced them to invest in learning English. The main focus of this literature review is on

Firadus. Jaidev (2011) reported that Firadus's investment in learning English is for academic and career purposes, since she was interested in pursuing her postgraduate studies in Singapore and advance from teaching physics at secondary schools to teaching at a university or college in Saudi Arabia. One of the biggest revelations of the study was Firadus's willingness to set aside her cultural and religious inhibitions for the sake of achieving her goals. Firadus reported that in Singapore she would talk to boys, teenagers, and even men to practice her English, something she would never do in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, Firadus reported selectivity in terms of the people she would communicate with; she would not communicate with someone who had body piercing for example. Through Firadus's story, one can see the relational nature between learning a language and identity: based on your identity you decide to learn a language, and because you learnt that language, your identity shifts.

Altamimi's (2014) study that investigated the challenges faced by 62 Saudi women students learning English in Halifax, Canada is valuable because it shows how learner's socio-cultural factors affect their faculty to learn a language. Altamimi (2014) showed how typical Saudi women characteristics limited their interaction inside and outside the classroom. For example, the need to avoid interactions with men, and some of the "off-limit" topics in the curriculum made the Saudi women shun interaction, and lose opportunities to advance linguistically. Although not clearly stated in the results or conclusion of the study, the lack of evolution in social identity clearly had an adverse effect on the language learning experiences for the Saudi women in Canada. With this in mind, it would be interesting to examine whether or not this case was also true for those learning English in Saudi Arabia.

The qualitative study by Alsweel (2013) attempted to understand the effects of ESL on Saudi women's role and identity at an English program in the US. Alsweel (2013) interviewed 16 Saudi women to understand how they perceive their roles and identities in Saudi Arabia; and how they perceive the change in their roles and identities after they acquire English. The importance of English in the lives of the 16 women can be illustrated using Bourdieu's (1984) theory of capital. The women reported the importance in the forms of economic capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. They also reported that acquiring English gave them increasing confidence and empowerment. Nevertheless, the most interesting part

of the study was how the Saudi women, in their acquiring English and attaining benefits from it, placed boundaries that were relevant to their religion and cultural identity, though they emphasized that their potentials and abilities were without limit. This suggests that the women value their culture and Saudi identity, and use them to acquire new dimensions to their identity that help them adapt in the new culture. The 16 Saudi women understood their role and identity back in Saudi Arabia, and the study documented how they maneuvered their roles and identities and managed to change within the boundaries to acquire new roles and identities aided by English.

### **3.5 Methodology: A Brief Critical Review of Studies**

This chapter helped me develop the necessary tools for data collection. While it would be ambitious to claim that I will review all methodologies used in the literature, in this section, I will focus on the studies that helped me the most during the development of Chapter 4.

Drawing on studies by Norton (2000), Alsweel (2013), Badry (2011), Ronesi (2011), Anbreen (2015), Jaidev (2011), Hopkyns (2014), and Al Abed Al Haq and Smadi (1996a) I developed the questionnaire used in Phase 1 of the study and several interview questions. It is essential at this point to provide a short discussion of the methods used in these studies. The studies by Alsweel (2013), Ronesi (2011), and Hopkyns (2014) all opted for a qualitative methodology, which was satisfactory given that the purpose of the studies was to understand the nature of identity in relation to language study. As expected, these studies used qualitative approaches to collect data, such as storytelling techniques, in-depth interviews, text analysis, open-ended questions, and questionnaires. While feasible for collecting data; these methods risk a higher rate of subjectivity. Badry (2011) and Al Abde Al Haq and Smadi (1996) opted for quantitative research methods to collect data. While numbers and statistics present solid evidence, they fail to capture the human experience, which is the usual purpose for conducting studies in the humanities and education. Two of the studies, Anbreen's (2015) and Jaidev's (2011) used mixed methods to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Nonetheless, Jaidev's (2011) study used only

one female participant; which is not statistically significant in terms of providing a clear picture about the phenomenon under investigation.

### 3.6 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I developed my theoretical framework that uses three feminist traditions, namely poststructuralist feminism, Islamic feminism, and intersectionality. Being aware of the importance of Islam in studying and understanding the case of women in Saudi Arabia, and that the three waves of feminism have been developed away from religion (Davids, 2014), I proposed using the “braided feminism” theoretical framework. In addition, I have argued for the need to use intersectionality to better understand Saudi identity with the *variable-with-variable* approach rather than the *variable-by-variable* approach (Romero, 2017). In line with that, I have argued for the need to shun the *essentialist/orientalist* understanding of Saudi women to better understand the complexity of their identities.

In the literature review, I tried to show the intersectionality of language, religion, social contexts, and gender in shaping the identity and sense of agency of female learners, and to elucidate the “real lives” context (Weber, 2004) the women experience. The review also revealed how formal and informal systems of power are deployed, maintained, and reinforced. While focusing on the key areas in the relationship between language learning and identity formation, I illustrated the paucity of literature dealing with the EFL context in general and Saudi women in particular. While the literature review highlights how social structures influence the construction of identity and social positions, it also shows how individuals can reflect on the same social structures to renegotiate their positioning. The review drew on Islamic feminism to showcase the tug of war in perceptions between the role of religion in shaping females’ identities in Saudi Arabia and establishing the need to explore this area in greater depth.

## Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

### 4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The preceding chapters elaborated on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the thesis, while highlighting important gaps in our understanding of the relationship between language learning and identity in the Saudi EFL context in general. These aspects have not only influenced the knowledge claims of this research, but also guided how the study was conducted. This chapter outlines the methodology and research design used for the study. This involves setting out the underlying assumptions that guided the research process, and detailing what was done and the rationale for it. Generally, a myriad of ontological and epistemological assumptions underpin different methods, and the suitability of certain methods for investigating social phenomena will depend largely on the context of the study. With that in mind, this thesis is designed philosophically based on the *interpretive paradigm* that uses *mixed methods interpretivism* (Howe, 2011).

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the interpretive paradigm and is followed by the research questions. After the questions are presented, the research design will be explained and justified before proceeding to the study sample. The research methods are explained and justified before considering the data collection procedures and data analysis. The chapter concludes by explaining the steps taken to ensure the quality of data, and a discussion of ethical considerations.

### 4.2 The Interpretive Stance

Any approach to inquiry, through the questions asked and the methods followed, entails the adoption of numerous ideological presuppositions on the part of the researcher, regardless of whether or not they are acknowledged (Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015; Lynch, 2008). To conduct any research, it is important to first know the assumptions. The current study, which strives to understand the nature between learning English in Saudi Arabia and the possible influence of identity and agency change for Saudi women, is ontologically and epistemological consistent with the interpretive paradigm. At the ontological level, the interpretive paradigm can be described as *anti-foundationalist* (Grix, 2004, p. 61) or *relativist* (Phakiti &



Paltridge, 2015, p. 17), which sees multiple realities existing in the minds of people and the world as not existing in a vacuum away from our knowledge of it. Instead, reality is seen to be socially and discursively constructed by human actors (Grix, 2004). Epistemologically, the interpretive paradigm adopts a *subjectivist* position “that attempts to know things are inherently and unavoidably subjective” (Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015, p. 18). As an interpretivist epistemology, constructivism extends a new definition of knowledge based on inter-subjectivity rather than classical objectivity and truth (Wellington, 2000). To be more specific, social constructivism discerns that knowledge is created and sustained by social processes and knowledge and social actions are intertwined (Young & Collin, 2004). In this regard, Burns (2000) suggested that, through the process of these interactions, environmental stimuli are processed by individuals to create their own meanings.

The rationale for adopting this interpretivist ontological and epistemological stance is related to the study. This study attempts to present meaningful explanations and a discussion regarding how learning English as a foreign language affects Saudi women’s identity and sense of agency, a case that seems to be socially and culturally specific. Thus, the study tries to understand and portray social events as they are and look for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). In addition, following Raskin (2008), human meanings are viewed as “constructed frameworks rather than reflections of the real” (p. 16), so that people are not creatures of determinism, whether natural or cultural, but are socially constructed and constructing (Sayer, 1997, p. 454).

### **4.3 Research Questions**

The current study attempts to explore the relational nature between learning a foreign a language and the shift in identity among Saudi women. Thus, the following questions are posed:

1. What are female Saudi EFL learners’ views regarding the status of English in Saudi Arabia in general, and the status of English as it relates to Saudi women?

2. What are the discourses of investment in learning English as a foreign language by Saudi women?
3. How are the identities of Saudi women learners affected by their decision to learn English?
4. What opportunities are available for women to exercise agency as they are learning English in Saudi Arabia?

#### **4.4 Insider-outsider: My position as a researcher**

This section discusses my position as an expatriate Muslim male researcher who is affiliated with a Western university, researching Saudi Muslim women in Saudi Arabia. I briefly discuss how reflexivity has emerged as an element of my doctoral research; yet I focus more on what it means to me as an insider-outsider researcher.

Milligan (2016) explained that in the realm of social research

we are neither entirely one identity nor another; neither fully inside nor outside. Rather, it is argued that researchers take on different positionings dependent on the situation that we may be in, the people we are interacting with and familiarity of the linguistic and socio-cultural norms. (p.240-41)

Social researcher have engaged in an extensive debate about the benefits and drawbacks of being either an insider or an outsider positioning. Insider researchers are seen as being able to engage their participants more easily (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), and utilize their commonalities (language, religion, shared experiences) to get rich data. In this regard, Kanuha (2000) explains that

For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied (p. 444)

On the other hand, outsider researchers are frequently valued for being objective and emotionally distant from the subject; nevertheless, outsider researchers are said to have problems in gaining access to research participant and provide rich analysis. Kerstetter (2012) argues that that cases in which a researcher can be characterized as a complete insider or complete outsider are

scarce. In practice, researcher's identity shifts depending on the situation, where and when the research is conducted, and the personalities of the participants (Mercer, 2007). Arthur (2010) argues that the researcher's insider or outsider position corresponds with the social, political and cultural values of a given context.

While I represented many of the stereotypical outsider traits (by ways of gender, race and nationality), I also was in a unique position of being an insider as well (by ways of sharing same language, religion, and social backgrounds). My position as a researcher in this project can be best described by Hellowell (2006) who put forward the argument that there are

subtly varying shades of "insiderism" and "outsiderism" ...  
[and] it can sometimes become quickly apparent that the same  
researcher can slide along more than one insider-outsider  
continuum, and in both directions, during the research process  
(486)

Having multiple commonalities with my participants, such as shared culture, religion, and first language, I was positioned as an insider-researcher, which enabled me to better understand the issue in-depth. The most notable 'insider' feature in this study is the *insider knowledge*. Gunter (2004) explained that people come to research with backgrounds that shape what they are interested in. I came to this research with an interest in understanding the impact learning English as a foreign language has on the identity and sense of agency of Saudi women. Although I was privileged in accessing the participants' backgrounds and stories, I also experienced a number of challenges while collecting data. Coghlan (2007) argued that insider-researchers may assume that participants will explain everything without much prompting because of the familiarity factor in their relationship. Nevertheless, my over-familiarity with my participants' experiences caused great difficulties for me to separate my own knowledge from theirs. In addition, as DeLyser (2001) argued, the participants' over-eagerness can create difficulties in eliciting the desired responses because the participants tend to engage in conversation about concerns that are not necessarily related to the specific questions.

Being a Western expatriate (Canadian) and a male represented my outsider position in this research. This position helped in bringing detached perception to

the subject under investigation. Nevertheless, from a reflexive point of view, being the outsider position meant that I needed to develop (a) critical awareness of my own position in interaction with the insider group, (b) critical awareness of the power relations, and (C) trust. It was important to me to create a clear identification of my role as a researcher, and share my findings with eight of the participants to ensure that I avert bias judgments. I admit that it was intimidating to my participants that an outsider is heavily interested in studying their actions; thus, it was essential for me to clarify my position and my intentions. My power as an outsider was also a great concern to me, especially during the interview process. Aléx and Hammarstörn (2008) highlighted that, in feminist qualitative research, “Despite the best of intentions, the interview situation may be experienced as, and may be in fact, a form of abuse” (p.170), thus emphasizing the importance of being conscious of any power hierarchies between the interviewer and the interviewee. “Practicing reflexivity can be one way to minimize such experience in the interview situation” ( Aléx & Hammarstörn, 2008). By piloting my interview questions first, and by reflecting on my first two interviews, I adopted a more collaborative interviewing process to allow for the shared creation of knowledge to create balance in the power relationship.

In addition to all that, my insider-outsider positioning in this research projects was colored by my exposure and knowledge of the gender discourses in the Arab Muslim world. On the one hand, I am Muslim and of Arab origins; and I have experienced firsthand some of the complexities engulfing that context. On the other hand, my outsider position stems from my position as a feminist who was educated in the West. This “privileged” position, in my opinion, was a reflexive caution to me “not to simplify any or all of the factors [affecting Muslim women’s lives] into clichés” (Abdo, 2002, p.229).

#### **4.5 Research Design**

Research design can be described as the blueprint for conducting a study. This study adopts an *interpretive exploratory* framework since exploratory research is the most advantageous when “little work has been done, few definitive hypotheses exist, and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon” (Patton,

2002, p. 193). The exploration of new phenomena in this way can help the researcher gain a better understanding, test the feasibility of a more extensive study, or determine the best methods for use in a subsequent study (Kumar, 2005). In the preceding chapters, I have elucidated the need to fill the gap in studying the influence of learning English in an EFL context (in this case, Saudi Arabia), and the possible impact on the identities and sense of agency of the Saudi women. I have also shown that a plethora of studies have adopted a Western feminist approach to the subject, and that both intersectionality and Islamic feminism need to be acknowledged when studying Muslim women. The decision to adopt the interpretive exploratory framework is underpinned by the severe lack of studies in this arena and my belief that the situation is not well understood. In addition, constructivists find explanatory power through the dynamics of social relationships between individuals (Burr, 2003). Thus, adopting exploratory data-mining at an early stage of this study will lead to focused data-mining, and pave the way to explore the myriad of factors and perspectives using data from Saudi women themselves.

#### 4.6 Research Methods

The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods (Given, 2008) explains that “In most exploratory studies, qualitative data predominates even when [it is] augmented where possible and desirable with descriptive statistics” (p. 327). This study, which is based on a *mixed methods interpretivist* approach (Howe, 2004, 2011), does exactly that.

*Mixed methods interpretivism* was coined by Kenneth Howe (2004). Howe (2011) explained that because he felt qualitative interpretive methods were “relegated to the auxiliary roles of description and exploration” (p. 120), a matter that was not satisfying to him, he advanced the alternative *mixed methods interpretivism*, which

reverses the epistemological ordering of methods such that interpretivist-qualitative methods are central, and expire mental-quantitative methods play the auxiliary role of identifying black box patterns of association that require further investigation by qualitative-interpretive methods to obtain deeper understanding of causation (p. 120).

The importance of adopting mixed methods interpretivism can be best understood when considering the theoretical framework of “braided feminism,” which I introduced in Chapter 3, especially when considering intersectionality. Dubrow (2013) explained that using both quantitative and qualitative approaches is needed to “produce a full and complete portrait of intersectionality, and to test its main assumption” (p. 164). In the design, quantitative data is used to give a situational picture of the status quo, which is then used as a basis for collecting more data. Qualitative data contributes by giving in-depth interpretations and helping to answer the question of how learning English affects Saudi women’s identity and sense of agency.

One of the tenets of mixed methods interpretivism is that it has a “democratic” approach, rather than an autocratic one, to gain knowledge. Mixed methods interpretivism implies that, for data to be valid and meaningful, as many voices as possible must be gathered and participants need to be understood on their own terms through inclusion and dialogue (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, p. 24). This democratic approach acknowledges that “the ‘insider story’ about meanings and experiences is fundamental to answering questions about causal relationships” (Gray, Plath, & Webb, 2009, p. 38). In other words, mixed methods interpretivism uses a constructivist lens where the perceptions of the world change depending on who asks the question and what is the question being asked.

The mixed method framework used in exploratory research and adopted in this study follows a sequential design. This consists of two distinct phases: quantitative research followed by qualitative research (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). According to this design, the researcher first collects and analyzes the quantitative data, and then the qualitative data is collected and analyzed, with some elaboration on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. The second phase, which is qualitative, builds on the first, quantitative phase, and the two phases are then connected in the intermediate stage. The rationale for using this process is that the quantitative data and the subsequent analysis provides a general picture of the topic (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006); whereas, the qualitative data and the interpretation helps to refine and explain the qualitative results by further exploring the views and opinions of the participants in more depth (Creswell et al., 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

The strengths and weaknesses of this kind of design are generally in line with those of sequential design, and have been well-documented in the literature (Creswell et al., 2003; Creswell, 2005; Creswell, Goodchild, & Turner, 1996; Moghaddam, Walker, & Harre, 2003). Of the advantages for this kind of design is its simple and straightforward process. Another advantage, and reason for it to be adopted, is that mixed methods research presents the most complete understanding of the research issue, because of the multiple methods being used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This kind of design is limited; however, because of the lengthy time and feasibility of the resources for collecting and analyzing both types of data (Ivankova & Greer, 2015).

In this study, a *sequential mixed methods interpretivism* design was used. Figure 4.1 shows the sequence of quantitative and qualitative methods and the stages when they are mixed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Ivankova & Greer, 2015). The figure is derived from a mixed methods notation system developed by Morse (1991), and elaborated upon by Ivankova (2015). The notations and explanations for the figure are given in Table 4.1 below the figure.

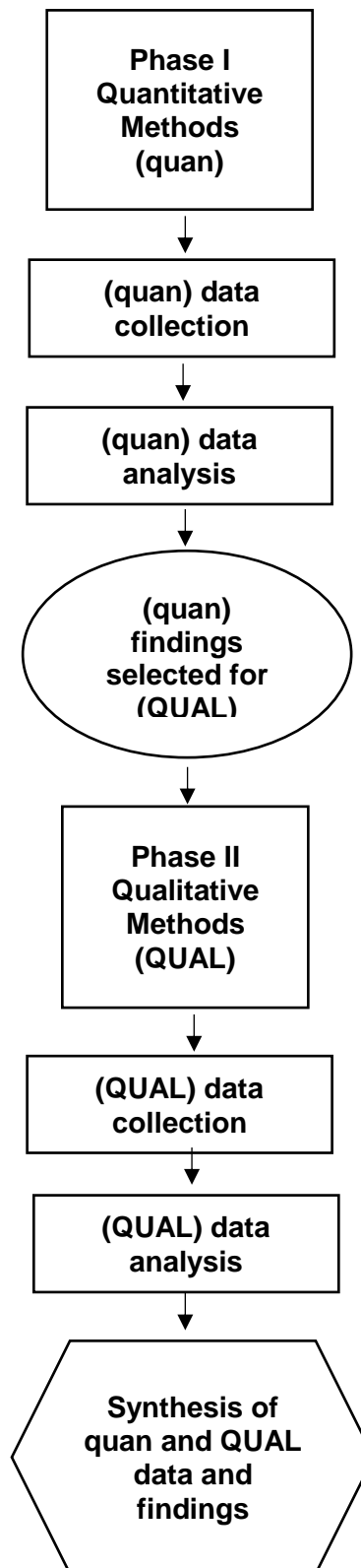





Figure 4.1: Visual model of the current mixed methods study design.



Table 4.1: Notations and explanations for the visual model (adopted from Ivankova, 2015).

<b>QUAN, QUAL:</b>	Uppercase letters indicate increased weight for either quantitative or qualitative method.
<b>quan, qual:</b>	Lowercase letters indicate decreased weight for either quantitative or qualitative method.
<b>Plus sign +:</b>	Indicates that quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed concurrently.
<b>Arrow :</b> ➔	Indicates that quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed in sequence.
<b>Rectangle:</b> 	Indicates a stage in quantitative or qualitative data collection and analysis.
<b>Oval:</b> 	Indicates a stage in quantitative and qualitative methods integration and results interpretation.
<b>Hexagon:</b> 	Indicates a stage where researchers create integrated conclusions from the quantitative and qualitative strands.

#### 4.6.1 Quantitative data: Questionnaire.

Brown (2001) defined questionnaires as:

any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers (p. 6).

Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) argued that questionnaires, generally speaking, can yield three types of data from the respondents: “factual, behavioral, and attitudinal” (p. 5). Although all three types of data are important, the attitudinal data is of great relevance to this study. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) defined this category, saying: “*Attitudinal questions* [italics in original] are used to find out what people think. This is a broad category that concerns *attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values.*” Subsequently, the authors defined each of the five categories of attitudinal questions. Brace (2008) clarified that “In all cases, the role of the questionnaire is to provide a standardized interview across all subjects” and questionnaires are important because “when those questions are asked, they are always asked in exactly the same way” (p. 4). Another vital feature of the questionnaire, which makes this tool invaluable for collecting data, is the anonymity of respondents. The anonymity provides respondents with the freedom to freely

express their true opinions (Walliman, 2011). Finally, in addition to the relatively easy administration of questionnaires, information can be gathered from a large number of respondents.

In this study, the focus of the questionnaire was to gather information regarding the role of English in the lives of Saudi women; to identify the relationship between English and Saudi women; and to uncover some of the intersectionality that is concerned with gender, religion, ethnicity, and language. More specifically, the questionnaire was designed to gather information about the participants' 1) backgrounds (e.g., hometown and marital status), 2) perceptions about the status of English in Saudi Arabia (11 statements), and 3) views regarding the relationship between learning English as a foreign language and Saudi women's sense of identity and agency (20 statements).

The questionnaire was designed to give the researcher an impression of the various participants, and at the same time, generate general data that could be used in the later phase of the study. The questionnaire used five-point, Likert scales (Appendix 4). Although the participants were learning English, the questionnaire was designed and deployed in Arabic to guarantee accessibility. A questionnaire in Arabic would likely yield more opinions and detailed answers to a larger number of the questions.

#### **4.6.2 Qualitative data: Semi-structured interviews.**

The interview method is considered one of the most important data collection tools in this study, and it was a means for learning about the participants' experiences and accessing their emic perspectives regarding the context of the study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The semi-structured interviews used a fairly open framework that allowed for focused, controversial, two-way communication so that the researcher and the participants could collaborate in the discussion that delved into details about the participants' personal histories, experiences, and practices. The semi-structured interviewing method, while allowing for a clear direction of themes and questions, also ensured the flexibility to "let the participant develop ideas and speak more widely on the issue raised by the researcher" (Denscombe, 2010, p.176). One of the advantages of the semi-structured interviews was that, while focusing on the main themes, the researcher was also

open to consider any emerging themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Nevertheless, semi-structured interviews are not without limitations, such as leaving out some questions when the focus is on other questions.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that three types of questions can be used in the semi-structured interview: *main questions* that address the main points and which are used as opening questions and to guide the interview. In this study, main questions were used to establish rapport with the interviewees and encourage them to express themselves freely. Second, *probing questions* are aimed at achieving clarity and obtaining more details. Probing questions are used to enrich the data and give the interviewees cues about the expected level of response (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Third, *follow up questions* are used to discover the implications of the responses to the main questions. In total, the interviews had 13 questions (Appendix 5).

#### **4.7 Selection of Study Participants**

Since this study adopted the mixed methods interpretivism sequential design, the sampling strategy was informed by Teddlie and Yu's (2007) and Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2009) sampling strategies that are built on the perspectives of probability and purposive sampling. To be more specific, this study used *sequential mixed methods sampling*, where the researcher selected participants by using probability and purposive sampling strategies one after the other. In this study, the sequence was *quantitative to qualitative*. The quantitative data revealed patterns that guided the selection of the sample for the semi-structured interviews. The sampling in the two phases of the study was dependent; i.e., the sample of the second phase (semi-structured interviews) was drawn from the first phase (questionnaires).

The sample for the questionnaire was selected using the multistage random cluster sampling method (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). This method of randomized sampling was used because of the geographically sporadic sample. The first stage was to divide the language schools in the Kingdom into regional clusters. Four regional clusters were selected: Eastern Region (Dammam, Khobar, and Dhahran), Riyadh Region, Madinah Region and Makkah Region (Makkah and Jeddah). The next stage was to cluster the language schools in each region into

fields of specialization (private language schools, university language institute, or in-service language institutes). After identifying the school clusters, a simple random selection process (Excel-generated randomization) was used to choose the schools to sample. At the schools, I adopted a systematic random selection to choose the classrooms to run the questionnaire. This sampling strategy was chosen to achieve a higher response rate and more diverse responses.

The selection process for the interview participants started after I received the questionnaires. The questionnaires included consent forms for interviews, where participants indicated their willingness to be interviewed by filling out and signing the form. When the completed questionnaires were returned with the signed consent forms, I then organized all of the interview requests into geographical groups (the same four groups as used for the questionnaire). Next, I organized each geographical group into school-type groups (private institute, in-job institutes, and universities/colleges) and then divided these groups into age groups. Before choosing the interview participants, the age groups were divided on the basis of marital status. Following the identification of all of the groups and subgroups, the interview sample was chosen purposefully, comprised of 12 Saudi women. The participants were selected to represent the context of this research, and they were purposefully selected from various regions of the Kingdom, various language institutes, various levels of education, and various social backgrounds (Appendix 3). To ensure their anonymity, the participants were referred to by pseudonyms of their choice.

#### **4.8 Data Collection Procedures**

Upon receiving the approved certificate of ethical research from the University of Exeter (Appendix 1), I commenced with the data collection. The form for ethical research approval (Appendix 2) included the purpose of my study and the procedures to be followed while collecting data. At the same time, the form stipulated that the researcher must confirm that particular attention is paid to ethical considerations, including obtaining a written consent from participants, showing respect to participants, and ensuring confidentiality for the collected data.

Having access to women English classes in Saudi Arabia is culturally and religiously prohibited; thus, I sought help from a number of women (Saudi and

expatriate) English teachers who were working in several institutes to collect the data. After contacting the women teachers, and before dispatching the questionnaires, I held a series of meetings to inform them about the help I needed, the objectives of the study, and the procedures to be followed. They had an opportunity to ask the researcher questions that could have been related to the concerns of their students about participating.

#### **4.8.1 Phase one: Questionnaire procedures.**

Before disseminating the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted with 20 Saudi women, who were my current students (but not part of the study population). The purpose of the pilot was to see whether or not the wording of the questionnaire was clear, and to determine if any changes were necessary before the questionnaire was actually given to the participants. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed in two ways: 1) given to the collaborating women language teachers in local language institutes, who then distributed them to Saudi women learners in their respective schools and institutes; and 2) a direct method where I established contact with the participants. In the first method, the completed questionnaires were returned to the teachers, who passed them along to me at a later time. Each questionnaire was attached to a brief introduction to the research project and its aims, with a statement about the questionnaire in non-technical terms that explained how the results of the questionnaire would be compiled. The statement also emphasized the participants' anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **4.8.2 Phase two: Semi-structured interviews.**

Phase two of the data collection began after the analysis of the questionnaires, when the statistical results provided an overall picture of the participants' views. A total of 12 recorded interviews (ranging between 45 to 90 minutes) were conducted in Arabic to ensure that the participants would be able to fully express themselves. Before conducting the actual interviews, three Saudi women (non-participants) were pilot-interviewed to allow for changes to be made to the questions; and to verify whether or not the questions were culturally and

religiously suitable. The locations for the interviews varied depending on available space and the participants' preferences.

Given the religious and conservative nature of Saudi Arabia, and the fact that foreign men and women cannot meet in public in Saudi Arabia, I gave an elaborate explanation to the participants about the social power dynamics of different places and their effect on interview data collection (Elwood & Martin, 2000). I also prepared a list of possible locations for the interviews to ensure that: (a) the women would feel comfortable and safe, (b) I would not be portraying myself as the 'expert' and the women as the 'object', and (c) the locations would be accessible. Since I work in a multinational company that does not separate men from women, I had a great advantage in conducting most of the interviews. When given an opportunity to choose the location of an interview, all of the women in the Eastern province (Dammam, Khobar, and Dhahran) opted to meet inside the recreational library at Saudi Aramco's residential camp. As for the other participants; three of them invited me to their homes (Faten, Noura, and Nouf). Saudi traditions and customs dictate that I get in touch with their husbands to introduce myself and establish rapport with them; and to get officially invited. In keeping with the traditions, I opted to visit the three participants with my wife, though neither my wife nor the participants' husbands were present in the interview sessions. The two student participants were met at their respective universities at their academic counselor offices. These interviews were facilitated by the teaching staff who helped me administer the questionnaires. One of the interviews (Faiza) was conducted at a hotel reception. Faiza's husband was seated in close proximity to us (but not with us), and he appeared to be engaged in some sort of business-related computer work. Despite keeping with the customs and traditions of Saudi Arabia, the women and their husbands/guardians showed great flexibility and understanding during the interviews.

After gaining the participants' permission, all interviews were recorded and transcribed in a timely manner so they were still fresh in memory. After all of the interviews were completed, Arabic transcriptions were translated into English by the researcher. To validate the accuracy of the translations, two interviews were selected randomly by a professional translator to check the translations. The translations were found to be similar.

## 4.9 Data Analysis

### 4.9.1 Analysis of quantitative data: The questionnaire.

After collecting the questionnaires, the closed-ended responses were entered and analyzed using SPSS to derive the percentages and frequency counts of the responses for each questionnaire item. Since this study is mixed methods interpretivist, the questionnaire data was not analyzed for any statistical significance. Instead, simple descriptive statistics were applied to the data for each research question and the results are presented in tables and figures.

### 4.9.2 Analysis of qualitative data: Semi-structured interviews.

The data analysis of the semi-structured interviews was informed by Weber's (1864-1920) "*verstehen*" approach; i.e., recognizing that people are not sterile subjects of a study, but rather pools of emotions, beliefs, anticipations, and logic that come in layers of cultural contexts, which requires them to be understood and with their experiences from within their own contexts. The intention here is to grasp the phenomenon under investigation more comprehensively through a systematic examination of the gathered data, involving reflective reconstruction and interpretation of the action of others.

*Qualitative thematic analysis* (QTA) was used to analyze the open-ended responses to the questionnaire as it allows for the recognition of patterns (themes) in large quantities of small pieces of data. Although open-ended responses can range in length from one word to a paragraph or more, discourse analysis methods were not used since the data tended to be bounded statements around the given topic and was not simply "talking" about the subject. In addition, QTA was used because it is a "search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82).

The semi-structured interviews were followed by data transcription, which can be regarded as the early stage of the analysis. Following Gilbert's (2013) comment that "cutting out or cutting down transcription may save on tedium but could be at an analytic cost" (p. 135), the interviews were transcribed verbatim, but without interruptions, pauses, or redundancies. After transcribing each interview, I went

through the sound file and the transcription at the same time to verify the transcription process and to reacquaint myself with the participants.

The approach of Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to analyze the data, involving three aspects: data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Namey, Guest, Thairu, and Johnson (2008) explained that “very few, if any, analyses of such data sets simultaneously involve all the data that have been collected”; thus, “researchers need to delineate the boundaries of a given analysis with a comprehensive analysis plan,” which could include “data reduction” (p. 139). In this study, coding and memoing were the major measures taken to reduce the data. Figure 4.2 shows the components of data analysis, based on Miles and Huberman (1994):

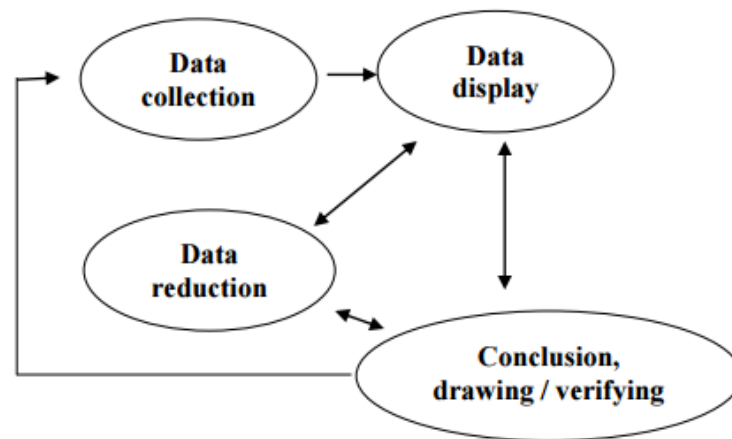


Figure 4.2: Components of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 12).

QTA codes can be generated by theory, prior data/prior research, or by the raw data. In this study I adopted a *hybrid approach* (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) with inductive and deductive coding and theme development. The hybrid approach incorporates both a data-driven approach and the use of pre-defined codes. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) originally outlined a six-stage process for using data in the hybrid approach: (1) developing the code manual, (2) testing the reliability of code, (3) summarizing data and identifying initial themes, (4) applying a template of codes and additional coding, (5) connecting the codes and identifying themes, and (6) corroborating and legitimating. The first two steps focus on developing the code manual for use in the deductive analysis, which, in this



case, was based on the posed research questions. The testing of the reliability of the code was done by a graduate of the TESOL EDD programme at the University of Exeter. The inductive analysis in this approach was carried out in steps 3 and 4, in addition to the deductive analysis. In step 5, I worked on connecting the codes and themes that emerged during the inductive and deductive analyses. Finally, to verify the accuracy of my work, I scrutinized the previous steps by performing several iterations for the codes and themes, and performed “member checks” (Creswell, 2013). Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) contended that “member checks” are useful in verifying interpretations of the collected data (p. 63). Member checks involve the participants approving the accuracy of their data by checking its content.

Member checking in this study happened in two phases: The first phase was by providing eight participants with their audio file and transcribed interview scripts for their verification. Each participant was given two weeks to verify their audio file and that the transcribed interviews were truly theirs. At this stage, each participant was given the choice to delete or add any information. The second stage of the member checking took place after each transcribed interview was coded. I emailed all eight participants their own coded interviews with interpretations. Each participant was allowed three weeks to look at the coded transcribed interview and the interpretations; after which the participants and I had a phone call to discuss the interpretations.

#### **4.10 Ensuring Data Quality**

Bryman (1988) contended that even though differences exist between quantitative and qualitative approaches, researchers tend “to create a somewhat exaggerated picture of their difference and theoretical irreconcilability” (p. 93). Like Bryman (1998), I believe that certain aspects of data quality in the two approaches are analogous to each other. To ensure the quality of data, the framework proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman (1994), Sale and Brazil (2004), and Bryman, Becker, and Sempik (2008) was adopted. In the following section, I briefly introduce the common standards of data quality adopted here and explain their use in this study.

#### 4.10.1 The common standards of data quality.

Table 4.2: Common standards of data quality for mixed methods interpretivism.

Standard Adopted in this Study	Qualitative Criteria Equivalence	Quantitative Criteria Equivalence
Truthfulness	Credibility	Internal Validity (Face Validity)
Consistency	Dependability	Reliability (Internal consistency)
Applicability	Transferability	Generalizability (or external validity)
Neutrality	Confirmability	Objectivity

##### 4.10.1.1 Truthfulness.

Validity denotes credibility in qualitative research and internal validity in quantitative research. A key technique for enhancing the credibility of this study was *triangulation*. Denzin (1978) suggested using four kinds of triangulation (data, investigator, theory, and methodological), and in this study, elements of all four were used. Various data sets can extend the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation; thus, using data from questionnaires, open-ended questions, and semi-structured interviews, and different types of questions in the interviews can support methods of triangulation. Researcher triangulation was achieved by involving my supervisor, graduates of the TESOL EDD program and current doctoral candidates at the University of Exeter, experienced women English teachers, and piloting samples in developing, revising, and receiving feedback on the study instruments. Theory triangulation was achieved with the continuous process of testing and comparing the findings to theoretical and conceptual frameworks described in previous chapters. In addition to triangulation, *member checking* – the process of presenting data to participants to assess whether or not the findings match their experiences – was also used with eight participants to increase the study credibility.

Since this study is exploratory in nature, it is not occupied with finding causal relationships as in explanatory studies. Rather, the causal relationships were revealed through the thick descriptions of the context. Internal validity in this study was achieved through applying controlling factors and avoiding internal validity

threats. For example, the purposeful selection of interviewees, and ensuring that they represented a wide spectrum of the Saudi female society increased the internal validity of the study. Also, by avoiding threats, such as maturation (e.g., passage of a long time to acquire a clarification from an interviewee), sample mortality (loosing respondents), and instrumentation (using different questions), the internal validity of this study increased.

#### **4.10.1.2 Consistency.**

This standard is concerned with dependability in qualitative research and reliability in quantitative research. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler (2006) defined dependability as “whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret data” (p. 275). To address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study were reported in detail to enable a future researcher to repeat the work. Such in-depth coverage also allows for assessing the extent to which proper research practices were followed. The other strategy for enhancing the dependability of the study is using the code-recode strategy (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Anney, 2014). Chilisa and Preece (2005) explained that during the code-recode strategy, the researcher codes the same data twice by giving at least one or two weeks’ gestation between each coding. The results from the two codings are then compared to verify whether or not the results are the same. The code-recode was done on selected data only. The reliability of this study has been achieved by piloting the questionnaire on 20 women students, and by training the women teachers who helped me administer the questionnaire. In addition, Cronbach’s Alpha was carried out to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The test score (0.865) shows the reliability of the instrument.

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.865	.874	31

Figure 4.3: Cronbach Alpha results.

#### **4.10.1.3 Applicability.**

Generally, applicability denotes the degree to which we can take what is learned in one study and use the findings in another setting or population. Several measures have been taken to enhance the transferability of this study, including: (a) clear definition of the aims of the research, (b) clear citation of resources, (c) thorough description of the study context and study sample, and (d) clear statement of the findings. The purpose here is to equip the reader with enough information to evaluate the degree to which another setting is similar to the setting in this study.

This study does not aim at “*representational generalization*,” but instead, aims at “*theoretical generalization*” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003), which is “the degree to which the data from a study supports existing theories and can be assessed, by comparing how well different cases ‘fit’ within an established theory and how far it is able to explain behavior in individual cases” (p. 267). The term, theoretical generalization, is used to allow theoretical propositions, and principles or statements of a more general application to be drawn from the findings of this study.

The aim of this study is not to generalize across contexts, but rather, to stress the unique characteristics of the Saudi women’s situation. This is not to say that the methodology, analysis, and findings do not relate to other contexts and situations. The population of this study (Saudi women) share many attributes of their Islamic and Arabic culture, not only in adjacent Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and Levantine and Mesopotamia regions, but also in several countries in East Asia (e.g., Malaysia and Indonesia). Thus, the study’s methodology, instruments, results, and recommendations could be transferable to these contexts. In addition, if we ignore the religious component of this study, it may be transferred to other contexts worldwide.

#### **4.10.1.4 Neutrality.**

The final standard is concerned with confirmability and objectivity that is to say whether or not the researcher had a priori assumptions that may bias the implementation and interpretation of the study. The continuous member-checking that was used during this study was the main measure for sustaining neutrality.

Both scripts and data interpretations were returned to the participants to validate the data and confirm that what was rendered is what they actually meant. An attempt was also made to perform an “audit trail” for the data, though this was discontinued in fear of preaching the tenant of confidentiality.

#### **4.11 Ethical Considerations**

Wellington (2000) posited that “ethical concerns should be at the forefront of any research project and should continue through to the write-up and dissemination stages” (p. 3). Following the comment from Brooks, te Riele, and Maguire (2014) that “ethical considerations do not cease to be relevant once ‘ethical approval’ has been gained” (p. 38), this study adopted what they called “ongoing ethical reflexivity” throughout the whole research process. Moreover, this study draws on Leedy and Ormrod (2016) who identified four categories of the most ethical considerations of any research: (1) protection from harm, (2) voluntary and informed participation in the research, (3) the right to privacy, and (4) honesty with professional colleagues.

This study was approved by the College of Social Sciences and International Studies Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter to ensure that the project and procedures complied with the ethical provisions of the University of Exeter and Graduate School of Education. Procedures to protect the participants’ rights and identities were followed as required for ethical research. Questionnaire respondents were anonymous and participation in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews was voluntary. They were both based on informed consent where each questionnaire respondent and interviewee had to sign a consent form before the interview. All participants were informed of their rights before they took part in either the questionnaire or the interview. The 12 interviewees were also informed of their right to halt the interview, listen to the tapes, and read the transcriptions of their own interviews for approval.

Publication of findings from the interviews are in the form of direct quotations, though pseudonyms chosen by the participants were used, and any identifier of their identity was removed. A major ethical point was the issue of the participants’ safety. Since the topic of this study touches on a sensitive issue in the Saudi society, I had to assure the participants that no harm would reach them as a result

of participating in the study. All of the data is confidential, and no-one else will have access to it except me and my supervisor. This was also the main reason why the “audit trail” was not performed.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Interpretations

### 5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I present the findings from the study. In keeping with the research questions guiding this study, the findings are organized into five main sections: 1) Saudi women's views regarding the status of English in Saudi Arabia and as it pertains to Saudi women specifically, 2) the discourses of investment in learning English by Saudi women in Saudi Arabia in the form of push and pull factors, 3) the impact of learning English on Saudi women's identity, 4) agency available and exercised by Saudi women as a result of learning English in Saudi Arabia, and 5) learning English as a site of struggle.

In each section, the findings are discussed in reference to key themes identified in Chapter 4. In keeping with the sequential mixed methods approach, I integrate findings from the questionnaire and interviews where appropriate, when discussing the various themes in each section. The findings are first reported with a consideration of the questionnaire responses, and then with a consideration of how the interview responses explain, or elaborate on, the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. In some cases, the themes are identified solely from the interview data.

### 5.2 Study Participants

In this section, I provide a brief biography of the participants so as to make their voices and stories clearer to the reader.

Table 5.1: Participants' biographical data.

Name	Age	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Place of origin
Faten	42	Married	M.Ed Education	Univ. lecturer Writer and novelist	Jeddah
Muntaha	36	Married	MBA	Bank employee	Dhahran
Zamzam	29	Single	2-year Diploma	Admin Assistant	Khobar
Eiman	25	Engaged	BA Math	Math Teacher	Khobar
Noura	38	Married	High School	Housewife	Riyadh

Nouf	50	Married	BA Social Studies	Retired Teacher	Riyadh
Faiza	40	Married	BA Islamic Studies	Islamic Studies Teacher	Mecca
Abrar	34	Married	High School	Housewife	Madinah
Salwa	21	Single	Psychology Student	-	Jeddah
Zayna	20	Single	Nursing Student	-	Riyadh
Rawabi	29	Married	School	Housewife	Dammam
Afaf	40	Married	College	Entrepreneur	Dhahran

### **Faten:**

Faten is 42-years-old and a university lecturer in the field of education. She is also a digital novelist who publishes in Arabic online, and an active columnist and writer. Faten aspires to resume her education and earn a Ph.D. in the field of digital education, and publish her first English novel. She is married with three children.

### **Muntaha:**

Muntaha is 36-years-old and a bank employee. She recently finished her MBA degree from a British university in Bahrain. Muntaha is taking business-related English courses because she aspires to leave her customer relation position in the bank and move into a managerial position. Muntaha is married with two young children.

### **Zamzam:**

Zamzam is 29-years-old and an administrative assistant in a local multinational company. Zamzam started learning English as a means to improve her employment opportunities. Her journey with English started when she was in an in-house training program for employees who had graduated from local colleges and universities.

### **Eiman:**

Eiman is a 25-year-old Math teacher. She earned her BA in Math from a local Saudi university. Eiman worked as a Math teacher in local Saudi schools for a year and then had the opportunity to move to a private school that uses an American



curriculum. Eiman is engaged to a US graduate who works in a multinational company. She began her journey with English to improve her spoken English and better her chances at her new job.

**Noura:**

Noura is a 38-year-old housewife who finished high school. Noura has three children in international schools and she is studying English to help them in their studies. Noura lives with her in-laws at the same house.

**Nouf:**

Nouf is 50-years-old and from the capital city of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. She is a retired social studies teacher. She has two children who are currently in the US preparing for their undergraduate studies.

**Faiza:**

Faiza is 40-years-old, from the holy city of Mecca. She is an Islamic studies teacher at a local school, and an active blogger on Facebook and Twitter about Saudi Arabian women. She is a licensed teacher for Quran studies. She is married with four children.

**Abrar:**

Abrar is a 34-year-old housewife from the second holy city of Madinah. Abrar is married into a highly conservative family. Her husband works in the family business.

**Salwa:**

Salwa is a 21-year-old psychology student. She is active in community service initiatives and describes herself as enlightened and well-read. Salwa has travelled as a visitor to many Western countries, but not to study EFL.

**Zayna:**

Zayna is 20-years-old and in a university nursing school in Riyadh. She is the youngest in her family. Her father is a senior project manager with a multinational

company in Riyadh. Zayna aspires to improve her English to join Johns Hopkins hospital at Saudi Aramco.

#### **Rawabi:**

Rawabi is 29-years-old and has completed her 10<sup>th</sup> grade of school. She married at a young age and lives in Dammam city with her in-laws. Rawabi reads a lot online, and wishes to expand her knowledge by reading materials in English online.

#### **Afaf:**

Afaf is a 40-year-old business entrepreneur. She imports women's accessories from various locations worldwide and runs a successful shop in Dhahran that targets many expatriate women in the region. Although she describes herself as a modern Muslim woman, she insists on describing herself as a committed Muslim.

### **5.3 The General Status of English in Saudi Arabia**

A general consensus was found among the questionnaire respondents and the 12 interviewed women on the importance of English to Saudis. Of the questionnaire sample, 100% and all of the 12 interviewees agree that English is important to all Saudis. One of the strongest indicators of the strong status of English in Saudi Arabia is the employment index. Table 5.1 clearly shows what Saudi women think of English in terms of employment in Saudi Arabia.

Table 5.2: Saudi women's opinions about the importance of English for employment.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. I believe that learning English is important to find employment in Saudi Arabia	64.3	30	4.3	1.4	0

Of the respondents to questionnaire item 4, 94.3% agreed that English proficiency was essential for finding work, which also corroborates the widespread assumption that linguistic proficiency in English is a key to finding a job in Saudi Arabia. This view was intriguing to be expressed from Saudi women, because the

general image that comes to mind when discussing employment and work in Saudi Arabia is concerned with the men rather than the women. This may be attributed to the myriad of misconceptions surrounding Saudi women. The point is especially important because, in the Saudi society, not all jobs require a mastery of English, especially public jobs, such as those in law or public affairs, where Arabic dominates. This finding reveals that the participants are following a trending opinion that is widespread in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, my focus was to understand why the women felt this way. Surprisingly, their responses did not convey a fight-back discourse to overthrow men's dominance and authority; rather, they involved an official discourse related to the Saudi vision 2030.<sup>10</sup> Section 2.1.3 of the Vision mentions Saudi women as being a pivotal asset for the Kingdom's future:

Saudi women are yet another great asset. With over 50 percent of our university graduates being female, we will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy.

Several of the women referred to the Vision in explaining the status of English in Saudi Arabia, even though the Vision itself does not mention any foreign language as an instrument for achieving the goals. The women explicitly stated that the high status and prestige attached to English was not an exaggerated phenomenon, but rather, English is pragmatically needed for the next phase of Saudi Arabia's future. We can surmise two things from these opinions that I will discuss further in the next chapter: (1) Saudi women's understanding of the importance of English to enter the Saudi job market is a reiteration of the idea that Western/Anglo-American forms of feminism portray Saudi women as being oppressed and one-dimensional, and this does not and should not be applied to the study of Muslim women, and (2) evidently, major Saudi political, societal,

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<sup>10</sup> The Saudi Vision 2030, which was announced by the Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, is built on three pillars: the Kingdom's status as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds; the Kingdom's determination to become a global investment powerhouse; and the strategic geographic location of the Kingdom that makes Saudi Arabia an epicenter of trade and the gateway to the world.

cultural, and even religious authorities and institutions are altering the “Wahabi religio-political discourse” to advance Saudi women.

Despite the consensus about the importance of English in Saudi Arabia, some disagreed about whether or not that importance is exaggerated. Muntaha, a customer relations officer at a local bank, believed that the importance given to English was once exaggerated in Saudi Arabia, but with the economic and political imperatives in the Kingdom, she now deems learning English a must:

With this initiative [Vision 2030], English is not only a luxury, it is a must. The initiative will open the Kingdom’s doors to foreign companies; and the locals need to be ready for that by at least good command of English. So, if it [English] was exaggerated once, which I do not think it was, it is a must now.

Among those who also shared the beliefs of Muntaha, Zamzam recognized the ubiquity of English in Saudi Arabia and its potential to *“give them [the citizens] access to knowledge and education necessary to realize this Vision,”* which *“will help expose them to different cultures and ideas; and consequently choose what meets their needs and the needs of the country at the next stage.”* Zamzam’s comment somehow differs from the foci of the Vision, which states that, to achieve national unity, which will eventually lead to realize the Vision, citizens need to uphold Arabic. Zamzam alluded to the idea that attaining English is one of the most valuable assets in the Saudization policy, with its purpose to see nationals occupy most of the vital jobs in the country, which in return, will strengthen the national unity of Saudi Arabia.

Afaf, an independent entrepreneur, believed that the influx of millions of foreign workers to the Saudi society is a good reason to consider English as an important tool. Afaf also attributed the importance of English in Saudi Arabia to what she labelled *‘the digital era’*, which is highly affected by the advent of the Internet, where a lot of business is conducted today. Another take on the digital era came from Faiza, an Islamic studies teacher, who said that *“long gone are the days when you got your news and data from TV, newspapers, and libraries.”* Faiza believed that the numerous data sources and the presence of a myriad of media sources are proof that English is a must in modern Saudi Arabia. In that regard she commented:

I love to go online and see what people say about us [Saudi Arabia, and Saudi women in particular]. We need to be able to go on those websites that defame us to defend our religion, ourselves as Saudis. If we stick to what we know and what we are comfortable with, we're sticking our heads in the sand like ostriches... My husband told me that an American colleague of his read an article somewhere on the 'net talking about how abusive the country is to women... and that this American guy responded to that blog by setting the record straight. Why wasn't it one of us who did that?

Statistically, and corroborated by the above narratives, a substantial percentage of women (45.7% of the respondents to questionnaire item 3) do not see that the importance attached to English in Saudi Arabia is exaggerated. The opinions and narratives indicate that women consider English to be a language of economic power, knowledge and education, cultural exchange, national unity, the digital era (the Internet), business and trade, and the mass media. In contrast, the questionnaire data (Table 5.3) shows that a high percentage of uncertainty (24.3%) exists among those who believe that English is important in Saudi Arabia, but its importance is being blown out of proportion.

Table 5.3: Saudi women's opinions about the exaggerated importance of English.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. I believe that the increased importance of English language in Saudi Arabia is exaggerated	5.7	14.3	24.3	35.7	10

Faten, for example, believed that the importance of English is built on many unsubstantiated claims that have been mongered in Saudi society, such as employment and prosperity, and this has been the direct result of a long-time **normalization** process that she believes started with the government who gave English a much heavier weight in the official curriculum. In her opinion, equating English proficiency with finding proper employment opportunities is a simplistic view and an uncritical understanding that language proficiency can obscure other unemployment barriers such as the lack of necessary training or having the proper credentials. According to Faten,

Normalization is the word that comes to mind when we talk about English language in Saudi Arabia. What I mean by that is that the widespread use of English in the Saudi society is uncontested!! Nobody

really thinks about it. It became customary to hear at schools, jobs, friend and family gatherings people talking about how important it is to master English. Or my son/daughter is taking this or that English course/ or how someone failed to get a job because he did not score high enough in the job placement English tests... Rarely do you hear someone saying that he/she is unqualified or lacks necessary training. Unfortunately, people's brains are designed now to embrace English as part of our life in Saudi Arabia.

Like Faten, Rawabi believed that the market forces are behind the faux importance of English, which she also labels as a 'delusion'. In Rawabi's excerpt below, she explains the *received knowledge*,<sup>11</sup> and how urban myths about certain foreign languages can endow these languages with undeserved powers in local communities:

First, they [language schools] delude you to believe that English is your key to a happy life; and their ads in newspapers always emphasize this by showing happy faces, or pictures of graduates...language schools; people around you, the community is guilty of parroting things without investigating...language schools in Saudi Arabia exploit the myth that is circulating in Saudi Arabia that English is your key to success. People and the community, unfortunately, also, help in perpetuating this delusion. So, you start hearing the stories of "My son got this job after he completed X months of English" or "Before English, his search for job was in vain.

Abrar explained that the popularity of English does not exceed it being fashionable. Abrar contended that "*people accessorize nowadays by learning English*". Salwa, a psychology student, tackled the exaggerated importance of English in Saudi Arabia from another angle; i.e., English as a language of instruction at local universities and colleges. Salwa believed that "*it is very regrettable to see that more and more Saudi universities are moving towards Anglicizing their curricula*"; however, she offered no substantial reason for that opinion. Salwa explained that she spent a whole year in what is called a "Preparatory Year" at college where she had to study courses in reading and critical thinking, academic writing, listening and speaking, among other things.

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<sup>11</sup> Received knowledge, referred to in this study, is an epistemology in which women tend to perceive knowledge as a set of absolute truths transmitted from authentic and infallible sources. As such, the received knowers learn and transmit the same words without further scrutiny. In our case, some women are considered received knowers since they parrot what is said about English without critically analyzing it.

Nevertheless, what shocked Salwa “*to the core*” was that when she received her four-year study plan, Arabic was in the plan and was called, “*Arabic as a second language*” and they “*had to learn about Islam, modern social problems, and Arabic Heritage in English!*” Salwa said,

I appreciate that my school is partnering with a Western school, this giving us the chance to receive quality education. But the things I do not appreciate are: First of all for Arabic and Islam being taught to me, a Muslim native speaker, as a second language, which gives Arabic an inferior status. Secondly, being taught in English [here Salwa reads from her school’s broacher] ‘this means that after you graduate, you will stand out in the employment market’... this is funny because my employment market is Saudi Arabia where maybe our clientele do not speak English! I believe it should have been the other way around.

The importance of English was also seen through other discourses (Table 5.3), and in response to questionnaire item 5, 61.4% of the survey respondents considered English as a source of social status and prestige. Moreover, in response to questionnaire item 31 regarding the relationship to bilingual Saudi women, 52.8% of the respondents indicated that they relate more to bilingual than to monolingual Saudi women. The interviewees did not openly discuss this issue, but in the discussions, they eluded to their preference towards bilingual Saudi women. This phenomenon can be interpreted to what I call, in-gender hegemony between the “haves” and the “have nots” among Saudi women.

Table 5.4: Saudi women’s opinions about the status of English.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29. English is the language of modernity and elite	27.2	38.6	15.7	11.4	7.1
5.I believe that, in Saudi Arabia, speaking English is prestigious	30	31.4	20	12.9	5.7

Despite the apparent division in opinion regarding the importance of English, all women agreed on two things: the status of English as *a primary foreign language*; and the *performance status* of English within the Saudi society. While discussing the status of English in Saudi Arabia, the interviewees unanimously

dismissed the idea of granting English an *official* status and the status as a *second* language, insisting on labelling English as a *foreign* language. In defending their opinions, the women showed a great deal of awareness about the roots behind the labels. Eiman, for example, explained her objection to labelling English as an official language since *“English doesn’t fulfill any official function within the Saudi governmental agencies.”* Abrar, in turn, explained that *“it’s hard to assign English the status of a ‘second’ language solely based on the operations of private companies... As long as Arabic is the language of communication, English will remain foreign.”* Faten used history to explain that *“official or second are usually used in countries where Britain was the colonizer; Saudi Arabia has never been colonized.”*

The second aspect is the performance status of English, which was also clearly presented by the women. When asked about the various functions English serves, the women’s answers varied: for economic and business purposes, international travel and tourism, communication (with maids, shop assistants... etc.), and other functions. Zayna interestingly distinguished between what she called, *“strategy-drawing and operational languages.”* Zayna believed that within the Saudi public sphere and some private sector companies, Arabic is used to draw the strategy of the organization or company, while English is used to carry out the operations. She based her opinion on her experience with her father, a civil engineer:

My father is a civil engineer and he owns a construction company. Most of his business comes from the government. When he’s at a meeting with the government representatives Arabic is the language they use to draw the strategy and sign the contract. But when he’s talking to his people, who are responsible for the operations, he uses English heavily to ensure smooth running of the operation.

Another dimension of the schizophrenic effect was evident in the responses regarding the impact of the widespread use of English in Saudi Arabia in terms of the Saudi culture and Arabic language. From the survey results, 64.5% of the respondents did not correlate the impact of the ubiquitous English language in Saudi society with any drawbacks or negative impacts on Saudi culture and society. In the interviews; however, the women were adamant that English represented a vehicle that transported Westernized ideals and ideas, though none



of the 12 women blamed English on the maladaptation of Westernized ideas, instead blaming the people. This was evident in Salwa's comment that *"we can blame English for the moral corruption some of our citizens have, like we can blame the car for an accident. It is the user rather than the tool."*

Faiza, an Islamic studies teacher, gave an example of Dr. Zakir Naik, a famous Islamic scholar and personality on TV, for using English to spread the message of peace and Islam. Faiza emphasized that learning English as a foreign language was a religious duty that all Muslims should do, and she used the story of Zayd Bin Thabet, one of the Prophet's companions, who was ordered to learn Hebrew and Syriac. The connection between English and Islam was made clear by the questionnaire respondents, where 92.8% did not see English as something that contradicts Islam. In any case, the Islamic objectives for learning English was not accentuated as being the most important issue.

#### 5.4 Status of English: Saudi Women's Prism

The discussion regarding the status of English as it pertains to Saudi women in particular is interesting as it adds a new layer to the schizophrenic effect. The answers to questionnaire item number 2 that asks whether or not learning English is especially important to Saudi women showed that 96.8% of the respondents feel that English is especially important to Saudi women. The questionnaire also revealed that most of the respondents do not see any detrimental effects from learning English on the societal image of Saudi women (Table 5.5):

Table 5.5: Saudi women's opinions about the impact of English on their image.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. As a Saudi woman, I believe that my image will not be affected because of learning English	42.9	25.7	12.9	12.9	5.7

In contrast to the questionnaire results, when the Saudi women were asked whether or not learning English was especially important to them, most of the interviewees gave a negative response, saying that no special importance should

be attached to English and Saudi women. Faten elaborated on this issue by pointing out the recent developments in Saudi women's status and rights (such as voting and running for office). Faten argued that "*Women are almost...and I say almost like men. Learning English to them should be of the same importance as learning English is to men.*" Muntaha shared the same sentiment, though Muntaha saw Saudi women as being rightfully equal to men:

Saudi women are Saudi citizens, and in my opinion they are not of less importance than Saudi men; so my answer is English is important to all Saudis, male or female. I don't think we should treat any sex any different when it comes to education. However, women should strive to learn more English because as mothers and probably the number one consumer of services in Saudi Arabia, English is very helpful to them.

One comment that stood out as being critical was Salwa's comment that revealed her critical understanding of the circulating agendas and views concerning Saudi women that stem from the West.

That's exactly what they [Western powers] want! Saying we need English to be important... The West... they portray us as slaves for our fathers and husbands and they want everyone to believe that English will free us. They even say if Muslim women in Britain learn English, there will be no more Daesh<sup>12</sup>

Another critical comment that was made was concerning the importance of English to Saudi women per se, which was made by the oldest participant, Nouf (50-years-old), who was a retired teacher. Her comment will appear again in the discussion about the Islamic discourses by another participant. Nouf commented:

You need to understand that we [Saudi women] are under what you can call, '**burden of representation**' عبء التمثيل... we are under the burden to represent our religion first, our country second, our families third, and lastly if ever ourselves. So to attribute any importance to anything other than Islam and Arabic to Saudi women is to argue against what we are supposed to represent and what we have always been exposed to at schools and homes.

The discussion about the importance of English to Saudi women in Saudi Arabia illustrates the widespread belief among the women that can be summarized

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<sup>12</sup> DAESH is the Arabic acronym for ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), which is classified as a terrorist organization.

in three points. First, *“not all users are equal, or have equal opportunities”* (Afaf). The idea that Faten elaborated on was *“men with lower English proficiency are preferred to women with higher proficiency.”* This was also corroborated by all interviewees in response to the question: “Who do you think benefits from English more in Saudi society, men or women?” The united answer was that both benefit, but men get more benefits than women. Second, a conflict exists in Saudi society between what I call **‘self-content’** and **‘general content’**. The two notions can be defined by Zamzam’s explanation of the conflict between *“what women want, and what society wants from them”* (Zamzam). According to the women, since English is highly prized in Saudi society, more significance is given to acquiring it by the men, rather than by the women, due to societal conception of male guardianship. Muntaha took this point further to point out the discrimination in her workplace *“In the bank where I work, more men than women are sent to attend these executive language courses... advanced English courses to prepare employees to become managers and supervisors”*. Third, almost all women voiced a fear *“to tamper with the hierarchy of power in the society... Certain people see it as being dangerous for women to learn English and interact with others”* (Salwa). Rawabi and Abrar confessed that they had a really hard time convincing their husbands to learn English. Abrar said that her husband “interrogated” her intentions for learning English, and Rawabi illustrated her husband’s scrutiny by saying, *“It’s not that he does not trust me, but there is much scrutiny from the society, close and extended family.”*

While discussing the Saudi women’s quest to learn English as a foreign language, three distinct discourses came to the surface: the discourses of *guilt*, *defiance*, and *Islam and Quran*. I will briefly showcase each of these by citing examples from the participants themselves.

#### **5.4.1 The discourse of guilt.**

While discussing the status and importance of English as it pertains to Saudi women, some interviewees disclosed their feeling of guilt as a result of learning English, or promoting English learning. Five of the seven mothers who were interviewed (Muntaha, Noura, Abrar, Rawabi, and Nouf) did not express their own feelings of guilt about learning English, but they expressed guilty feelings about

English language education for their children. Ideas of language loss (Arabic) and pride about speaking English among their children were sources of concern.

Muntaha said:

I feel guilty that I pushed them into international schools... I'm concerned that they will not speak Arabic fluently, and my biggest concern is that they might lose connection with reality that they are Saudis and start acting like Americans

Abrar mentioned that in addition to her feelings of guilt when she decided to immerse her son in an English-speaking curriculum school, her in-laws also felt guilty about her doing so. Abrar's biggest fear was that her son "*will consider Arabic a religious, ceremonial language and adopt English as his language of daily communication.*" Nevertheless, despite their feelings of guilt, some of the women took no steps to avoid English, while others did. Once again, the evidence for the schizophrenic effect could be seen in that some women believed that English should not be put on a pedestal, but they still pushed their children to learn it.

In the study, another kind of guilt surfaced that was an example of the schizophrenic effect: the regret of not studying English harder or sooner. Faten, who believed that the importance of English in Saudi Arabia was exaggerated, disclosed that if she had started learning English earlier, she would have probably had a better chance to obtain a PhD scholarship. Eiman, who also believed that the importance of English was exaggerated, moved from a public school to a private one. She believed that an early start in learning English would have equipped her with the English language competency needed to keep up with the students in her school. Eiman said, "*I see the little girls laugh at my accent and when I have to use Arabic to explain something because I could not say it in English.*" Afaf joked about her regrets and feeling of remorse that she did not start English earlier: "*If I knew that by learning English my husband would get off my back, I would have done it ages ago.*"

#### **5.4.2 The discourse of defiance.**

Learning English was sometimes interpreted as an act of defiance by the women. Muntaha disclosed that men at her workplace were being sent to attend language courses to prepare them for managerial positions. Muntaha explained

that her decision to learn English on her own was interpreted by a female colleague to be a sign of defiance. To Muntaha, the reason for this had been earlier described by Salwa as *“tampering with the hierarchy of power”*:

She approached me asking me about the English courses.... Then she sarcastically said “Do you think that by doing this you’ll twist their arm to move you up?... I’m not sure Abu Abdullah [the branch manager] will like that!” The Si Syaed<sup>13</sup> mentality still prevails. I heard it from them [male colleagues]. They said if X [another female colleague in a higher position] becomes manager, I will ask for transference (Muntaha).

Of particular interest was Muntaha’s belief that her current position at her workplace was not commensurate with her qualifications and experience; and she believed that she was hired *“to fill a Saudization quota.”*<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Muntaha contended that by being deprived of the opportunity to pursue in-job English courses that would enable her to climb the employment ladder, she was being subjected to a systematic de-skilling scheme that caused her skills to slowly erode and fossilize. Muntaha commented that,

being restrained did two things to me: The first thing is that it made me seriously think of moving to [a global oil and gas company] where they provide better development opportunities, and that would be a **brain waste** for the bank; and the second thing is that being restrained heightened my creativity to find a local language school that could be tailored as a business communication course... I do not consider it [learning English on her own] defiance, I consider it ambition.

The religiously and culturally prescribed discourse of women’s roles in Saudi Arabia was ubiquitous in the discussion of familial interventions; taking us back to what Nouf called a “burden of representation.” All 12 of the interviewed women agreed that the source of the practices concerning Saudi women comes partly from the Islamic Sharia’a, though much of it also comes from uncontested cultural practices and misinterpreted Islamic verses.

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<sup>13</sup> Si Syaed is an Egyptian expression denoting that a man is in control and on top of the family’s hierarchy. It is equivalent to a “macho man”.

<sup>14</sup> Saudization is a government mandated law that requires companies in Saudi Arabia to employ a certain number of Saudi citizens that is proportional to the size of the company. Saudi companies that do not comply are denied government contracts and licenses to operate within the Kingdom.

The discourse of defiance, for the main part, encompasses a religious discourse on Islam and Quran exegesis, and given that learning English has often been perceived as religious defiance, the following section deals with the idea.

#### **5.4.3 The discourse of Islam and Quran.**

The discourse of defiance was discussed in tandem with another strong emergent discourse; i.e., the discourse of Islam and Quran. Often, the women referred to Islam or the limited understanding of Islamic teachings and Quranic interpretation, as a basis for their argument to pursue English learning. Interestingly, according to Noura, *“older women in the Saudi society have been long cultured to be misogynists.”* Several of the interviewees criticized the older women in their families (e.g., mothers, mothers-in-law, grand aunts, etc.) for being fiercely disapproving and discontented about their pursuit of English learning. In doing so, the women showcased religious arguments that they often endured that were to curtail their English learning. In this section, I provide several examples of the religious arguments and discuss their significance to this study.

The first example, from Afaf, is of her great aunt who shocked her with the argument that learning English was a door through which Satan (*Shaytan* in Arabic) enters decent Muslim women and causes them to follow the infidels (Kuffar in Arabic) and lose their chastity. Afaf's great aunt introduced the first intersection with the Saudi women's identity of being obedient and pure, with the argument from the Prophet (Hadith in Arabic) that *“من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم”* - “Whoever resembles a people is one of them.” The encounter between Afaf and her great aunt is a perfect example of the grass-roots understanding of many Muslim women that appearances and behaviors are the barometers that measure “good” or “bad” Muslim women; as it is a perfect example of the generational gap for the great aunt who represents the generation that was mostly illiterate and with little knowledge of Islam beyond daily practices. Similarly, the religious discourse of English as the language of the infidels was used with Rawabi, whose mother-in-law disapproved of her learning English: *“Isn't it better if you taught your kids the Islamic morals and virtues rather than resembling the infidels?”* This presents another intersection with the Saudi women's identity that is Arabic language. When associating language with a certain group (in this case, English as the language of the infidel), Zayna

showed deep critical understanding of the danger in associating languages to groups. Zayna said,

I believe they are wrong [people who equate English with Christianity] because if we consider English as a Christian language, the language of the infidel, this will force them [the West] to look at our language as the language of terrorism. I think they truly believe that because in more than one movie, you'll hear the terrorist shout "Allah Akbar" [Allah is the greatest]. It's a two way road... languages should be free of any political meaning.

These incidents elucidate the discourse of some Saudi women as the repository of Islamic values and the true "essence," and as the emblem of Islamic purity, with Arabic being the language of believers and the source of all goodness. At the same time, it shows both sides of the coin: women who succumb to the ambivalent discourse regarding the negative influences of language on identity and Islam; and the critical analyses of those who are concerned about the relationship and ways to fight it. Abrar commented about the hegemonic, misogynist, and hypocrite stance of her mother-in-law by questioning the socially prevalent status quo, where she is labelled as "*the norm*." Why is the "*woman responsible for instilling Islamic virtues on children? And when the children fail, why is the mother to blame?*" She also pointed out the hypocrisy of "*when men do anything, it is okay and justifiable. But when women want to do anything, it is forbidden and will lead to corruption of the society.*"

The incident that involved Faiza, the Islamic studies teacher, and her mother, is worth scrutinizing. Faiza's mother reacted to her decision to begin learning English with the firm belief that Faiza was doing "Haram" (forbidden). Faiza disclosed that her "*mother tried to shame [her] as being a sharia'a [Islamic jurisprudence] graduate for studying English.*" According to Faiza, her mother used a verse from the Quran "وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى" ("And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance," Quran 33:33). Faiza revealed that her mother, "*like the case of many other older Saudi women, I'm sure,*" was using the verse from the Quran to make a general rule for restraining women from leaving their homes, unless it is absolutely necessary. To address this verse in particular, Faiza gave me a lengthy lecture

about how she argued with her mother regarding that verse, the essence of which is the following:

This verse is read in two different ways: Madina readers render it as *Wa Qarna*, meaning: stay at your home. Nevertheless, Basra and Kufa readers render it as *Wa Qirna* (different vowels), meaning: act with dignity. You can read about this in Al-Farra' explanations... big difference between stay at home and act with dignity!<sup>15</sup>

The discussion with Faiza regarding this verse is interesting since, on one hand, she argued that society has perpetuated readings and interpretations of the Quran that satisfy the tribal and cultural customs and traditions, but on the other hand, Faiza argued that Muslim women need to emulate the mothers of Muslim. At the same time, she called for a critical interpretation of the Holy Quran that *“does not take the side of the men for everything,”* and she explained that, *“Ayisha in many times was the source of tafsir [interpretation] of the Quran.”*<sup>16</sup>

The various encounters between the participants and the older women generation in their families signify the existence of a generation gap between today's educated women and the older women. The generational gap comes in several guises such as: (1) the experience of life stages where the older women were forced into marriage at an early age, and they were preached to follow their husbands; (2) in education, Saudi women currently take education for granted, and many have been educated in the West, in contrast to the religious education their mother and aunts received; and (3) in seeking employment, today's women do not shy away from employment opportunities and seek them fiercely, in contrast to their stay-at-home mothers whose only job was to rear their children and look after the wellbeing of their husbands and the family. These examples illustrate the dramatic shift that is taking place in modern Saudi Arabia, and is at the center of the debate involving various generations of women in Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>15</sup> I verified this explanation in length by reviewing several books of *Tafsir* (exergies) and books of *E'erab* (semantic parsing).

<sup>16</sup> Ayisha is the wife of Prophet Mohammed who was the closest to him and who outlived the prophet for many years. Being that close to the Prophet, Ayisha memorized many of His sayings; and in many cases she was a reference for many religious disputes and enquiries from the companions.



My discussion with Nouf took another turn. To Nouf, the issue of re-reading the Quran from a feminist perspective was necessary if women are to gain “*the God-given rights to be what Islam wants them to be.*” Nevertheless, Nouf voiced a concern about several issues: First, “*they [male interpreters of Quran, Sheikhs, Higher Jurisprudence Authorities] will fight back to maintain the status-quo... They will present evidence to disqualify women from interpreting the Quran.*” This signifies how the male figures are considered gate-keepers before they allow women to engage themselves in reading and interpreting the Quran. Second, “*let us imagine that women did read the Quran and new interpretations came out. Do you think that the tribesmen will embrace them with open arms?!... Of course not.*” Third, echoing Faiza’s concern, “*there may be feminists with twisted agendas... They adopt Western ideals and attribute them to Muslim women to show the world that we’re advanced.*” The fear of resentment, lack of commitment from social stakeholders, and the fear of misusing Quranic interpretation by some Westernized feminism scholars caused Nouf to prefer that the “*feminist interpretation of Quran remain private among women themselves, in the hope that they will influence their immediate circle.*”

The priority that Saudis attach to their religious concerns is also reflected in the *Vision 2030* clear mention of Islam as the major identifier of Saudi people, and of “Islamic principles of moderation,” as the way forward. Driven by that spirit, one can appreciate the earlier comments, stories, and aspirations about establishing a feminist interpretation of the Holy Quran and Islam. At the same time, not all of the interviewees supported the idea of a female interpretation of the Holy Quran. Noura, for instance, asked, “*Is there going to be a Male Quran and a Female Quran?*” Noura and others believed that a *standpoint feminist Quranic exegeses* will lead to greater corruption and deviate from the true spirit of the Quran. Here, we can see that women like Noura still experience the schizophrenic effect; on one hand, requiring a Quranic exegeses that gives women their God-given right, but on the other hand, they do not want a *standpoint feminist exegeses*.

## 5.5 Discourses of Investment in English

While mining the data to codify the themes of discourses of investment in English as a foreign language by Saudi women, I noticed the frequency of certain

words being repeated, such as “push,” “force,” “lead,” “pull,” “allure,” and “attract” in discussions about a) the women’s reasons for learning English instead of other languages, and b) the women’s reasons for learning English in Saudi Arabia instead of abroad. These reasons are re-conceptualized and presented here in terms of “push and pull” factors. Moreover, the push and pull factors discussed below were not mentioned on their own by the women who also tended to mention a myriad of push and pull factors that affected their decisions.

In this study, the push factors denote internal conditions that moved the Saudi women to learn English (e.g., personal desire or personal feelings) and the social, economic, and cultural conditions in their backgrounds. At the same time, the push factors deal with the decisions of women to learn English in Saudi Arabia instead of abroad. In this study, “push away factors” are used to describe the factors that push the women away from learning other languages or learning English abroad. Pull factors, however, denote the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the target language, and the external attitudes and responses of the established members of the target language that pull the Saudi women towards learning English. In addition, I use the term “*location pull factors*” to describe the reasons that pull the women to learn in Saudi Arabia.

Because this study involved 12 Saudi women, and the data that was generated went beyond a reasonable word limit for this thesis, I use examples for the push and pull factors.

### **5.5.1 Push and pull factors for learning English.**

Several push and pull factors were identified as reasons for the decisions of Saudi women to learn English. In any case, all of the factors mentioned here may not necessarily be generalized to all Saudi women. Thus, examples are used to highlight the push factors.

#### **5.5.1.1 Self-development push factors.**

The 12 women mentioned that learning English was a means for their self-development, and the discourse assumed three avenues: 1) the working women mentioned self-development as a means to augment their employment advancement; 2) the students mentioned self-development as a prerequisite for

their studies; and 3) the mothers in the group mentioned self-development as a means to help their children. Of particular interest was the discourse where the women used several religious references to argue for their decision to learn English. This also gave a glimpse into the gender war raging in Saudi Arabia between what is considered religiously-bound versus what is culturally acceptable.

Noura showed how being a woman in Saudi Arabia can sometimes be a hindrance, and she showed how an understanding of the culture and the men in the culture, use religious scripture to enforce cultural norms. In her discussion, Noura referred to the difference in religious and cultural intent and the application of “*وقل اعملوا فسيرى الله عملكم ورسوله والمؤمنون*” (“Act! Allah will see your deeds, and so will His Messenger and the believers,” Tawba, v. 105). “*I wonder why in my culture the religious commands to seek, change, and act are male-specific; whereas, the commands to stay at home, follow, and submit are female-specific. The verse said ‘Act’ and wasn’t followed by a specific gender!*” Afaf mentioned that she used the verse “*لا يغير الله ما بقوم حتى يغيروا ما بأنفسهم*” (Allah will not change the condition of people until they change themselves,” Ra’ad, v. 11) in arguments with her great aunt about the need to initiate change for the best. To her surprise, her great aunt used the same Islamic discourse to solidify a misconception that learning English resembled the infidels. The other participants used different verses of the Quran to show their strong belief that pursuing English was not against the teachings of Islam, and that they considered their self-development as a religious command: Rawabi said, “*يرفع الله الذين آمنوا منكم و اللذين أوتوا العلم درجات*” (“Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees,” Almujaadalah, v.11) to argue that “*learning English, in [her] opinion, falls into the category of knowledge seeking.*” Similarly, Abrar used the verse “*وقل ربي زدني علما*” (“and Say [O Mohammed], My Lord, increase me in knowledge,” Taha, v.114) to show that the Quran and Islam actually encourage the seeking of knowledge, not harnessing it. Faiza went a step further and recited a Hadith (Prophet Saying): “*طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم*” (“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim”, Ibn Majah, 224) to solidify the idea that “*pursuing English is knowledge, and according to the Hadith is a must, not a luxury... I feel that I am fulfilling a command from Allah and the Prophet.*”

Nevertheless, the self-development discourse also involved opposition. Rawabi and Abrar presented the best examples of opposition to the discourse from their families. To Rawabi, the opposition was in the form of “*knowledge surpasses the need*,” and while discussing the matter with her husband she had to prove how English would develop her, and how would she use the self-development. To Rawabi’s husband, the knowledge of English that she was pursuing surpassed her needs. This idea also illustrates how patriarch societies make decisions on behalf of the women, and how women are pigeonholed into prescribed roles. As another example, Abrar disclosed that the only reason her husband approved of her decision to learn English was that it would be good for their children.

#### **5.5.1.2 Economic push factors.**

The idea of increasing their mastery of English to attain greater economic benefits was a push factor to learn English for most of the women. Nevertheless, the economic push factor came in many forms, such as seeking employment, maintaining employment, and a lack of opportunities for advancement. Zayna, the nursing student, recognized the importance of increasing her proficiency in English to find a decent nursing job after graduating: “*I want to be employed at either Johns Hopkins or one of the specialist clinics; thus, improved conversational English is a must for me ... My nursing English is good, but my conversational English will improve my chances.*” Feeling frustrated about being stuck at one position was also a push factor for Muntaha to pursue English. She explained that her endeavor to attain a higher level of business English to pursue a managerial position at her workplace was perceived as being futile by some of her colleagues and her family members, based on the commonly held belief that “الشاطرة تغزل ولو برجل الحمار” (“**A smart woman will spin yarn even with a donkey’s leg**”). This proverb is used to argue that smart women can achieve a lot with few resources, and it suggests that learning English to achieve a better employment status (and better financial position) is unnecessary.

Other examples of economic push factors are offered by Eiman and Afaf. Eiman’s desire to keep her job (a well-paid position) at the international school is another manifestation of how economic factors act as push factors for the pursuit of learning English. Afaf explains her decision to learn English:

The only way I could expand my local business in Saudi Arabia is by expanding my resources... I mean the places where I get my merchandise from. I depended for long on local brokers to get me stuff; but with improved English I can save that money, do the transactions myself; and earn more for myself.

Generally, the Saudi women who accentuated the economic push factors as the driving force behind their decision to learn English were educated and between 20-42-years-old. Some of the housewives, however, mentioned the economic push factor for learning English in terms of bargain hunting and finding discounts online. Abrar mentioned the Amazon.com Black Friday discounts and her desire to take advantage of the discount seasons to save money (i.e., “pay less, get more”).

#### **5.5.1.3 Knowledge push factors (Faten’s story).**

The knowledge push factor was apparent in Faten’s story along several dimensions, such as: filling the knowledge gap, knowledge transfer, and pursuing knowledge. In these three dimensions, Faten showed great awareness about the pivotal role English plays in fulfilling them, and how they act as push factors for her to learn English. Faten felt frustrated by the knowledge gap in the literature for her field of specialization. She was also frustrated by being unable to communicate the Saudi literature to the outside world. This knowledge gap and knowledge transfer dilemma acted as a push factor for her to invest heavily in English. She explained:

I could’ve hired a translator to translate for me the articles I wish to read in English; and to translate my writings, both the academic and factious writings, but I’m confident that my understanding and the message will not be the same.

Thus, Faten believed that her key to filling the knowledge gap and ensuring the correctness of her message would be through English. In addition, Faten’s determination to break the monopoly of knowledge held by the English-speaking staff was another push factor for her to learn English. Faten posited that *“they [Saudi and expat English-speaking staff] want to keep the conferences and publications to themselves. Through mastery of English, I can guarantee that I will have my fair chance.”* Faten also disclosed that her desire to share her ideas and feelings about the Saudi and Muslim communities with the world through her novels and other writings pushed her to advance her English.

To Faten, pursuing more knowledge in English was an integral part of her PhD quest. Faten's desire to pursue a PhD in an English-speaking country, either via her university or the King's scholarship pushed her to pursue learning English. Faten explained this push factor:

I feel incompetent when it comes to my field. I can write brilliantly in Arabic; but English language scholarship is highly valued. Also, I feel that I am unheard because of my Masters, a Ph.D. will give me voice to show true me.

#### **5.5.1.4 Language abundance pull factors.**

Part of the discussion with the participants revolved around their reasons to learn English, and specifically in Saudi Arabia. Some of the responses to the questions can be classified in terms of language abundance. This term is based on Zamzam's comment that *"in Saudi Arabia we have 'wafra' (Arabic for abundance) in English language speakers, English language centers, and opportunities to use the language."* Salwa and Zayna explained the language abundance through the introduction of English in public schools from grade 4, and through the introduction of English as a major component in the preparatory years at local colleges and universities. Abrar believed that *"other languages are useless in Saudi Arabia; where am I going to use French, for example?"* This opinion explained the abundance of opportunities to practice the language, which acts as a pull factor to learn it.

In the discussions about other language speakers in Saudi Arabia outnumbering the speakers of English (e.g., Urdu, Hindi, and Tagalog), the women referred to the idea of "quality vs. quantity." The social image of a foreign language speaker clearly dictates the value of that language, and consequently, assigns it to the status of abundance. To the women, the worker status of Urdu and Hindi speakers, and the maid status of Tagalog speakers made it hard for the participants to embrace those languages. The following examples from Nouf, Salwa, and Afaf represent this sentiment:

Not to be disrespectful or anything, but there isn't any benefit from learning their languages; I mean they themselves adopted English in their countries, right? Besides, I believe that they should learn Arabic as long as they're in Saudi Arabia (Nouf).

If what you're saying is true, then why isn't Chinese language the most learned in the world? There's a billion Chinese? I know of people who learn Chinese in Saudi Arabia, but that's for business reasons, not because there're a billion Chinese persons! (Salwa)

The number of speakers of any particular language is not the reason why people learn it. Take French for example. Only France and a small number of African and European nations speak it; but there is a prestige to the language that draws people to it. Where is the appeal in Urdu? I don't want to sound racist, but when you think of Urdu the image that comes to mind is a maid or driver, which is, honestly, not very encouraging (Afaf).

#### **5.5.1.5 Higher rate of responsiveness (PULL) and fear of rejection (PUSH).**

One of the pull factors that propelled the women to learn English was the higher rate of responsiveness from other social stakeholders (e.g., shop-keepers, hospital personnel, and other service providers in Saudi Arabia). Abrar explained the higher rate of responsiveness by saying that *"whenever I visit a hospital or a clinic, I feel that the English-speaking staff tend to prioritize me once they see that I speak English."* Nouf presented an example of how she uses English to increase the rate or responsiveness in getting services:

English is very instrumental in my day-to-day life, especially over the phone with many customer care providers such as STC and OSN.<sup>17</sup> I discovered that if I opt for the "speak in English option," I tend to hook up faster and easier than if I select "speak in Arabic". Also, I feel that the people assigned to the English line are more helpful.

At the other end of the continuum, some participants indicated that the drive behind their investment in English is from the fear of rejection. Faiza explained that she often had to deal with English in Saudi Arabia, and when she could not convey her need or message precisely, she would put it aside until someone volunteered to translate, and to her, that was a huge source of embarrassment. Faiza admitted that *"I really felt uneasy having to wait for a staff member, or another customer volunteer to come and translate for me... I decided that I will spare myself this*

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<sup>17</sup> STC is the Saudi Telecom Company and OSN is the leading satellite TV provider in the Middle East.

*embarrassment*". This explanation from Faiza corroborates Afaf's comment that in a culture like Saudi Arabia, face and dignity are everything; and not being able to keep up in a conversation that might be loaded with English terminology, and "*the fear of being labelled as a socially incompetent interlocutor by groups of people who adopted 'Arabeeze'*<sup>18</sup>" was enough motivation to learn English. The last comment from Faiza elucidated the initial findings that English competency is a sign of social prestige. At the same time, Faiza's use of the word "label" indicated that English proficiency is a stratification tool to divide the 'haves' from the 'have nots' within the Saudi women groups. Salwa also mentioned that "*the girls who are most competent in English actually sit together, and they only speak English with one another,*" and she mentioned that this particular group of girls actually use English as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion: "*They kind of test you to see if you are competent enough to join them...just like the Mean Girls movie.*"

This point came up in the discussion with Faiza in a different disguise. Faiza, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, was an active blogger on websites that discuss the Kingdom in general, and Saudi women and Islam in particular, in addition to her own Twitter and Facebook accounts. She said,

I feel that I receive more responses if I write in English than in Arabic... My fear is that my Arabic interventions and comments land me in trouble... I feel that the dialogue is prolonged if it was in English... Do you remember when Manal Alsharif was detained for defying the driving ban? I was online that period talking about Islamic perspectives and Saudi cultural norms for over a month. I did not dare to write a comment in Arabic, actually, I deleted any comments or tweets that I got in Arabic!

On the surface, Faiza's comment shows that Arabic would be taken more seriously by the authorities, as one would be allowed to be critical in English but not in Arabic. Nevertheless, during my 'member check' session with Faiza to gain more insight about this comment, she expressed her belief that Arabic tweets and blogs are under greater scrutiny by the authorities, compared to those in English. Faiza argued that "*in public spheres, it's safer to be critical in English than in Arabic because those who watch over the 'net I believe are not competent in English, and*

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<sup>18</sup> Arabeeze is a coined word that is a combination of "Arabic" and "Englizi" (Arabic word for English), denoting code-mixing and the exchange in conversation.



*Arabic can be used in strictly private spheres.*” Faiza referred to the Saudi activist Raef Badawi who was critical in a public sphere in Arabic, and who is now being prosecuted.

Of particular interest are the stories regarding the fear of rejection felt by participants, such as the fear of rejection that exists in the participants’ native country, but not in foreign countries where the student might be an immigrant and attempt to assimilate. Eiman, a math teacher at a local private school, commented that her fear of being rejected by her students, who are Saudi citizens with an excellent command of English, *“made me know how it feels to invest a great deal of time to learn a language to survive a harsh working condition, and to acquire the trust and love of people... I feel for my maid who had to learn Arabic.”*

#### **5.5.1.6 Child rearing push factors.**

The mothers who were participants indicated that part of their investment in learning English was for child-rearing. During the discussions, an obvious discourse was concerned with learning English to help children with their academic and social development for the short- and long-term. The discourse on child-rearing sounded somewhat *idealistic* (i.e., wishes, dreams, and desires for their children), rather than *realistic* (i.e., performance-based intervention and help). Most of the mothers indicated that they were investing in English to be *“better-equipped to help if needed”* (Rawabi), *“to keep up-to-date with their studies and curricula that is primarily in English”* (Muntaha), and to *“be able to communicate with their teachers and school administrators”* (Abrar).

One of the most intriguing explanations for investing in English for the purpose of child-rearing came from Faten who mentioned the terms *digital immigrant* and *digital native*:

My investment in English is an investment in bridging the generational gap between my kids, who are digital natives, and myself, a digital immigrant. With this generation everything is Facebook, snapchat, twitter, and it is all in English. I feel that I need to protect my kids from the bad influences by staying one step ahead of them.

One of the issues discussed in the child-rearing discourse is the desire of women to help their children attain the prestige attached to higher English proficiency. The women recognized the power enjoyed by English-speaking young

Saudis, and believe that an English-medium education is their children's path towards quality education at school and college, with better jobs and life in the future. The prestige sought by the women *"is not about bragging that my kids (Abrar's) can speak English, and it is not to classify them into any other category from their peers"* (Abrar), but it is about the desire of the women for their children to target US, UK, and top Saudi universities (such as KFUPM and KAUST) for their education.

#### **5.5.1.7 Familiarity with the language pull factor.**

One of the pull factors that drew the women into learning English was their familiarity with the language. Nouf explained:

I am from the generation that didn't study English extensively either at school or college. However, over the past years of work, taking care of my children, visiting English-speaking countries; and with the huge and rapid development we see in Saudi Arabia and the number of foreign workers we have here now made English more familiar to us. We hear it more, we have developed enough vocabulary and expressions.

The younger generation; however, credited their familiarity with English to the mass media and entertainment industry. Some of the women mentioned the names of soap operas and TV shows (such as Gray's Anatomy, Oprah Talk Show, and Lost) as the reason for their increased familiarity with English. The familiarity created what Zamzam called a *"comfort zone,"* pulling the women away from learning other languages. Zamzam said, *"I pondered learning Spanish or French, but I felt that there was some sort of a psychological barrier. I have no idea, no vocabulary, so I was really afraid to immerse myself in that experience and I chose to enhance my English to a working, professional level."* Eiman saw that *"building on the foundation we already have is easier than building from scratch,"* clearly indicating her familiarity with English.

#### **5.5.2 Location push and pull factors.**

The other part of the discussion with the women was dedicated to the reasons and discourses that led them to decide to pursue English at home (i.e., in Saudi Arabia). Several reasons were mentioned and grouped as follows:

### **5.5.2.1 Cost push factors.**

We saw earlier that economic factors acted as a push factor to invest in English in Saudi Arabia, instead of abroad. The participants highlighted that reasonably priced English language courses in Saudi Arabia encouraged them to register for them, and avoid other courses that had hefty prices. Muntaha commented, *“I believe language courses in Saudi Arabia are pricy; however, if you compare the total to the abroad experience, it is nothing.”* Rawabi highlighted that *“language centers attract qualified native speakers... so I do not see a reason to go abroad.”* This comment was particularly interesting because eight of the other interviewees highlighted that ‘native speaker’ teachers were one of the selling points for them to stay in the Kingdom and not go abroad. This appears to indicate a preference for native speakers over non-native speakers. Muntaha explained the difference in the course prices between one institute and the next: *“their relatively high prices in comparison to the market is justified because all their teachers come from the UK and US, not from Egypt and Jordan.”*

### **5.5.2.2 Islamic push and pull factors.**

While discussing the reasons for choosing Saudi Arabia to study English, the women revealed an integral part of their identity, as committed Muslim women. All of the participants accredited their decision to pursue English in Saudi Arabia as being due to their commitment to religious and social norms, which was manifest in several guises:

**A) Lack of Mahram companionship:** Faiza disclosed that due to her husband’s commitment at work, and the lack of a willing Mahram to accompany her abroad to study English, she decided to choose a language institute in Saudi Arabia.

**B) All-women language centers:** Rawabi’s decision to invest in English in Saudi Arabia was based on the availability of all-women English courses. This was particularly important to Rawabi because *“there are several women-related issues that I wanted to learn about in English, and having men in class would have hindered me from asking.”* This particular point was important to many of the women and was used to counter the arguments to forbid the women from pursuing English. While discussing this point, Afaf mentioned what her great aunt had said

to her when Afaf informed her that she would be attending an all-women language center. Her aunt's reaction was: *"At least she will not be exposed to foreign men."* The comment from Afaf's great aunt clearly indicated that the prevailing discourse on 'commitment to social traditions and norms' is a great barrier for her to pursue further education.

**C) Moral compass:** Several women indicated that their decision to learn English was based on the moral compass of the language centers. In other words, the women believed that investing in English abroad would entail learning about things that were non-Islamic. Nouf mentioned that this idea was based on her experience with her two children when they were learning English in the US, *"Yes, they have learned English, but they also teach them many cultural things that are unacceptable for us as Muslims: boyfriend/girlfriend, Christmas... I cannot imagine myself going through this."*

## 5.6 The Impact of EFL on Saudi Women's Identity and Agency

### 5.6.1 EFL and Saudi women's identity.

Identity is an elusive term to define, and many authors have used a myriad of techniques to relate and define the notion of identity. The Saudi women in this study were no exception as they responded to questions about identity in different ways. Before we delve into the concept of identity as presented by the participants, let us first examine some of the statistics (Table 5.6) regarding the relationship between EFL and identity.

Table 5.6: Saudi women's opinions about the impact of English on their Islamic identity.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. Learning English had a positive impact on my identity as a Saudi Muslim woman	30	24.3	15.7	15.7	14.3
13. Learning English had a negative impact on my identity as a Saudi Muslim woman	4.3	4.3	1.4	27.1	62.9

The above questionnaire items indicate that while more than half of the respondents recognized that English had a positive impact on their identity, 90% of them believed that English did not adversely affect their identity. In any case, the 90% figure does not indicate that English had an impact on their identity. By examining the other questionnaire items, we can see that the women associated the positive impact of learning English with their identity in terms of positive personality traits (Table 5.7):

Table 5.7: Saudi women's opinions about the impact of English on their identity.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Learning English has influenced the way I understand the world around me	40	37.1	8.6	8.6	5.7
16. Learning English has affected the way I relate to the opposite sex in society/work place	24.3	40	21.4	10	4.3
17. Learning English gave me more confidence to express my thoughts and ideas	32.9	51.4	5.7	10	-
19. I feel that people listen to me more, and take me seriously when I communicate in English	27.1	25.7	22.9	18.6	5.7
20. I find that I can discuss certain topics using English that I could not with Arabic language	22.9	27.1	14.3	28.6	7.1
24. I feel I am more independent with English	20	25.7	17.1	17.1	20
26. I feel English gave me stronger decision making skills	25.7	34.3	14.3	20	5.7
27. English language has given me the power to create change around me	25.7	42.9	18.6	8.6	4.3

By examining the questionnaire items, we can see that Saudi women, by learning English, describe themselves positively, to help them overcome the expected and prescribed views of their gender in the Saudi society.

During the interviews, the participants defined themselves in association with their country ("Saudi"), tribe ("Zahrani, Dossari, or Otaibi"), geographical region

(“Jeddawiyah, Meccawiyah, or Najdiyyah”),<sup>19</sup> and ethnicity (“Arab”). During the discussion, the women appeared to be aware of the intersectionality of their identities, as illustrated by their use of “Islam” as the baseline for their intersectional identity. Generally, the discussion with the Saudi women about their identities revealed two interesting findings, as revealed in the following quotations:

I think identity is evolving, *identity construction* is not an easy thing to do... it takes years to build that kind of identity you wish (Zayna).

At times, I use my family name to get access to services and things I need to do; at other times, I use the fact that I am a Saudi woman to get things done. One time, in the US while on a visit with my family I had to hide the fact that I’m a Muslim to get easy smooth service.... As you see I adopt the Arabic saying of “*لكل مقام مقال*” - There is time and place for everything (Abrar).

The first quote indicates Zayna’s awareness and understanding that identity is a site of construction, not an innate component. The terms “*building identity*,” “*identity construction*,” and “*identity structure*” were repeated by several participants. When elaborating on this point with them, it became evident that the women believed that identity is an evolving construction, and that social interaction and influence are major components of identity construction. Abrar’s quotation showed her awareness of the notion of *multiple-subjectivities*; i.e., the version of the women’s identity that is shown in encounters with the world. Several women indicated that they invoke certain parts of their identities based on their roles and needs, and they develop an awareness of certain parts of their identities based on encounters, emerging needs, and incidents. An example of multiple-subjectivities will be mentioned later in this section when reporting on Faten’s identity as a writer. At the same time, the narratives indicated that certain parts of the Saudi women’s identity were *context-contingent*.

Of course, no discussion about the identity of Saudi women could pass without mentioning their *gendered roles*. Many of the participants discussed the importance of Saudi women’s role in Saudi society, with a consensus that a shift should take place away from “*the traditional role of the Saudi woman*” (Nouf) as a

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<sup>19</sup> Jeddawiyah = from Jeddah (on the West coast of Saudi Arabia), Meccawiyah = from the Holy city of Mecca, Najdiyyah = from Najd (the central area of Saudi Arabia that includes cities such as Riyadh).

mother, caretaker of husband and children, and repository of morals and religious education. Faiza and Noura elaborated on this point:

I'm a wife, I'm a mother, and I'm sister and daughter; and nothing makes me prouder than being the one who takes care of my family, educating and protecting them. However, in Saudi Arabia people still limit our roles as women to these things... we need to stop limiting our girls, and start treating them as decision-makers with free-will who are capable of more than taking care of husbands and children (Faiza).

... Many women in Saudi Arabia, unfortunately, succumb to reality and male power. Women should strive to refuse the identity others give to them, and build their own identity within acceptable Islamic teachings and cultural traditions (Noura).

While discussing whether or not learning English has had an impact on their identities, all of the participants at first eschewed the idea that English had any impact. Abrar commented that "*English may have changed parts of my personality, not my identity,*" and Rawabi said, "*I'm the same person, but more confident in public now.*" During the discussions, several stories and narratives revealed that English did have an impact on their identities.

#### **5.6.1.1 Double identities.**

One of the emerging themes was the issue of having double identities as a result of pursuing English. Only two participants, Zamzam and Afaf reported that they had created two identities; one associated with the Arabic language world, and the other associated with an English language world. Both participants emphasized that Islam was the baseline for both identities; and the only difference between the two identities was in the norms of behavior and expression. Zamzam and Afaf explained the two identity perspectives:

My identity as a Muslim Saudi woman dictates me to have certain behaviors and modes of expression. For example, I would be very reluctant to speak or argue with a man in public; however, my English language identity is freer in terms of expressing my opinions... You should see me bargain over SKYPE or argue with vendors over the phone [chuckles] (Afaf).

I've noticed that when I speak English I am less tense and stressed... In dealing with Saudis and Arabs, you need to be extra careful about what you say for words are your image; and one mistake might taint your

image. However, when I speak English I tend to joke a lot, I feel like I can say whatever I need to say *uninterrupted!* (Zamzam)

These two quotations are interesting because they show how English provides more freedom of expression than Arabic for a conservatively defined image/role of women. The women were more daring in English, which did not have the same social implications and connotations as it might in Arabic.

#### **5.6.1.2 English and identity position.**

The story of Eiman is an example of how one identity position might be perceived as being insufficient for the person to enjoy social inclusion. In particular, Eiman's identity position as a monolingual (Arabic) young Saudi woman was perceived by her to be a deficiency in her identity that might block her inclusion from the new social milieu of her in-laws (who are mostly bilingual).

During the first weeks of my engagement to my fiancée, I lived in terror and huge stress. You see, he is a US graduate, and two-thirds of his speech was in English, he does that unconsciously. I used to sit there, listen to him, smiling and feeling bad that I don't get most of what he's talking about. Then I remember that I would panic, thinking to myself 'he will ask me now what I think, and he'll discover that I have no idea, and he will change his mind about this relationship'... But thank Allah he didn't! (Eiman).

Eiman understood that individuals belong to multiple cultural groups, and each group promotes a set of desired identities. Thus, monolingualism was not one of her fiancé's desired identities, though this was not explicitly mentioned to her. By learning English, Eiman took a pragmatic approach to ensure her inclusion. Of particular interest in Eiman's story is that her quest to learn English started to improve her chances to get a better teaching job as a math teacher, and later, it strengthened her communication skills after she got that job. Even later, her goal evolved into social inclusion when she became engaged to her fiancé who is a US university graduate.

Identity positioning was also mentioned by Nouf, who was at first hindered by her American woman teacher in regards to her education. Eventually, she was motivated to alter her identity to resist the identity position.

When I first registered in the language school, I started noticing that our American teacher was treating us in a very stereo-typical manner: I



mean she would spare us certain pages from the book, referencing our roles as Saudi women by saying things like ‘I’m sure your children will like that... your husband will appreciate that... when you go shopping abroad you can say this and that’. I started thinking that this lady thinks that we are a bunch of moms and wives who are hungry for English to shop and please our families (Nouf).

Nouf believed that her experience in learning English changed the docile and submissive part of her identity that had succumbed to prevailing discourses about her image as a Muslim Saudi woman. It made her use English as a resistance mechanism to rectify the stereotypical image used by her teacher and other foreign women.

#### **5.6.1.3 Writer’s identity.**

Faten, besides working as a lecturer at a local university, is an active digital novelist who writes and publishes online and actively writes about digital learning technologies in several local and regional newspapers. Faten’s writings stem from her experience as a Saudi Muslim woman, and her characters tend to showcase gender injustices and inequality in Saudi society. At the same time, she sheds light on Western misconceptions about Saudi women, and how they are portrayed in the Western media and literature. As for her technical writings in newspapers, they stem from her experience and work. Faten explained her identity by saying:

When I write my novels, I assume a completely different identity from when I write for my courses at college, or when I write an article for a magazine or newspaper about learning. Faten, when writing a novel is sensitive, conscientious, and determined to rectify misconceptions and wrongs through her factious characters. When writing an educational news article, Faten is confident, knowledgeable, and determined to educate and enlighten, and when Faten is writing her own journal, she is angry, tired, and wishes to rest... I am a writer, and writing says a lot about me, but again, every time I write, I am not the same person.

In the discussions with Faten, writing was evidently not just a hobby for her, but it was a mechanism to negotiate her identity. One of the major intersections in Faten’s identity is her role as a writer. Faten’s insistence on learning English and pursuing writing in English in various genres was an act of identity definition, because “*through my words, I hope that people see who I am.*” I asked Faten, “*Why are all your novels published on your website, not in paper format?*” Her answer was that she tried several times to get her novels that were written in

Arabic, published, but the “*publishers had many objections about certain words, phrases, character identities and events in my novels. I felt that if I omitted them, I would have compromised the authenticity of my work, and consequently lost my identity.*” The objections from the publishers, according to Faten, were a way to obscure her identity that sought to problematize certain practices in society. Faten gave the example of Rajaa Alsanea’s novel *Girls of Riyadh*,<sup>20</sup> which was first to be published by a Lebanese publishing house, though it was widely circulated in a PDF format online.

#### **5.6.1.4 Change in identity? I do not think so!**

Throughout the interviews, the women who felt they had only one identity spoke subtly about identity modification due to learning English. One of the most critical comments regarding the impact of learning English on a Saudi woman’s identity came from Salwa, the psychology student:

To be frank, I don’t feel that my identity as a young Saudi and Muslim woman is threatened in Saudi Arabia; and therefore, I don’t see the urge or the need to adopt a different identity. I believe people assume different identities to assimilate to foreign communities for purposes of protection, belonging, or finding jobs where the dominant language is English, or where not being able to speak English is a source of stigma... I don’t see it in Saudi Arabia.

Salwa refused to accept the idea that the core of her identity was changing because of her learning English, and she believed that identity change instigated by a foreign language, in this case English, was something that immigrants or students in Target Language (TL) communities have to do to survive, assimilate, or communicate. Salwa added:

...and to say that English changes identities is to confess the imperial powers of the language owners on our countries. We’re not Lebanon!... they have changed their language, and consequently changed their names, behaviors and their identity all together... You don’t feel that they’re Arabs. Yes, they are mostly Christians, but look at the Christians in Jordan for example, they are proud Arabs, never let the British change their language or way of living... They are still deep-rooted in their Arab, Bedouin origins... Saudi Arabia is the land of the two holy

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<sup>20</sup> The novel recounts the personal lives of four Saudi young women. Upon its release in 2005, the novel was banned in Saudi Arabia due to controversial and inflammatory content. Black market copies were circulated in Saudi Arabia and parts of the Middle East.

mosques, Arabic is and will always be the official language; we have never been colonized....so... I don't think so!

Once again, Salwa showed her critical understanding of the impact of the colonial inheritance on changing the linguistic tapestry in the colonies, which in turn, pushed people to embrace different identities. Salwa eluded to the relational nature of language and religion in her discussion and how colonizers manipulate the idea that to be closer to God, a particular language has to be adopted. It was clear from the discussion with Salwa that she equated Arabic to Islam and vice versa, and she was perplexed when I mentioned that Christians and Jews also speak Arabic as their native tongue from the old days of Arabs, and they still do. Regardless, Salwa remained adamant that Muslims need to speak Arabic to portray their religious identity.

#### **5.6.1.5 Identity maintenance.**

One of the clear themes that appeared from the data was the influence of religion (Islam), mother tongue (Arabic), and social and cultural heritage on maintaining the core Saudi and Muslim identity. In addition, the theme of identity maintenance was mentioned by the mothers. Muntaha, for example, said that *“we have enforced rules at home that communication between the children and us (parents) should be in Arabic only, and English is for school work.”* In addition, Abrar mentioned, *“I avoid speaking English at home because I want to show my children that English is not better than Arabic; and because I want them to grow as Saudis and Muslims.”* Clearly, speaking Arabic is strongly linked to being Saudi and Muslim.

#### **5.6.2 EFL and Saudi women agency.**

The questionnaire items (Table 5.8) that dealt with the relationship between EFL and agency for Saudi women included possible impacts.

Table 5.8: Saudi women's opinions about the impact of English on their sense of agency.

Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. I feel that I am more independent with English than before	20	25.7	8.6	25.7	20
25. I feel that English made me less dependent on my "Mahram"	14.3	14.3	25.7	25.7	20
26. I feel that learning English gave me stronger decision making	25.7	34.3	14.3	20	5.7
27. English has given me the power to create change around me	25.7	42.9	18.6	8.5	4.3

As can be seen in Table 5.8, the impact of English as a foreign language on Saudi women's sense of agency and freedom is not agreed upon. The questionnaire responses were equally divided in their opinion about EFL and personal freedom. For example, 45.7% of the responses to questionnaire item 24 agreed that English gave them freedom, but the same percentage reported the opposite. Unsurprisingly, 45.7% of the responses to item number 25 indicated that English did not untie them from a male guardianship, and 25.7% of the responses to the same question were unsure of any impact. In the same vein, 28.6% of the responses reported that English made them less dependent on their male guardians, which was a surprising result. The impact of learning English was greater on the women's personal sense of agency and power as 60% and 68.6% reported that English gave them stronger decision-making skills and power to create change in response to items 26 and 27, respectively. Thus, many aspects of the gender discourses in Saudi Arabia still hinge on societal cultural traditions. To look at some of the Quranic verses that the women used in their discussion about investing in learning English, we can see that most of the verses are open invitations and calls for agency and change. Nevertheless, the actions of Saudi women are generally shaped by social and cultural institutions and internalized customs that enforce a certain interpretation of the Quranic verses that strip

women from the capacity for autonomous action. In any case, such actions are less obvious now than they were before.

### **5.6.3 EFL and opportunities of agency.**

When discussing the opportunities of agency available to Saudi women as a result of learning English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, we need to remember that Islam constitutes the baseline of their intersectional identity, and one size does not fit all. Thus, Muslim women are agentive in ways that differ from Western definitions of agency. In the discussion in this section, I will introduce the opportunities of agency available to the Saudi women from a religious perspective, as presented in Chapter 3.

#### **5.5.3.1 Compliant agency.**

To begin, we first need to define *compliant agency* before elaborating on the subject. Compliant agency is similar to what Mahmood (2001) introduced in her research and called *docile agency*, describing women's interaction with and embrace of religious traditions while still remaining bound to the marginalization that is prescribed by a particular interpretation of Islam. This type of agency is used to perpetuate and consecrate male domination. This particular perspective of agency is also closer to what I would call *confinement agency*, where women are confined to predefined spaces of agency that condemn them to a life of domesticity. In any case, compliant agency also describes women's interaction with and critical embrace of religious traditions to better themselves and pull away from seclusion. This is done by creating new spaces for agency that deconstruct the world made for them without their active participation.

One of the early comments on the *confinement agency* came from Noura who said, "*My decision to learn English was to show others that I can make decisions other than what to cook and how to make decisions on behalf of my family.*" Abrar also said that her decision to learn English was not based on "*boredom or looking for a new thing to kill time while waiting for my husband and children to get back home,*" but rather, it was a decision she made being "*fully aware of my value as a mother and a human being who needs to communicate with the world.*" Thus, these Saudi women are opposing the domestic version of their identity by fighting

against the kind of agency that limits their powers to matters that are only related to family.

Most of the reported agentic actions or agentive English learning can be classified as *compliant agency*; i.e., the women choose to conform to religious teachings while taking action. Compliant agency does not mean that the women succumb completely and must comply with the religious teachings as prescribed by their culture, but rather, they would comply with the religious teachings that guarantee their autonomous actions, and they would adopt an interpretation of religious scriptures that grants them the power to act (for additional discussion see Mahmood, 2001, 2005; Muhanna, 2013). Throughout the discussions with the participants, this was hinted at.

One of the many opportunities of agency for the participating Saudi women was seen when discussing the reasons for choosing Saudi Arabia to learn English. The discussion was an epitome for compliant agency. The women complied with the religious teachings of Islam that calls for women to have guardianship if they wish to travel abroad for an extended period; or choosing to pursue their English education in Saudi Arabia. In her interview, Eiman mentioned that, upon her engagement, her father and her fiancé offered her English classes in the UK or Canada, but she chose Saudi Arabia because she did not want to take much time off work, and she wanted to stay close to her family. Noura, Rawabi, and Abrar all commented that Saudi language schools are aware of Saudi women's obligations, duties, and roles as mothers and daughters, and provide flexible schedules for the women. This is another example of compliant agency.

#### **5.6.3.2 Agency of investment.**

This form of a learner's agency appears in several guises, such as the level of investment in learning English as a foreign language, the type of investment in English language courses, and the investment in specific skills. Some women showed their agency in this area by arguing for the English programs and institutes they chose in Saudi Arabia. Afaf, for example, showed her agency by saying, "*I learn what I need to learn, not what they want me to learn,*" referring to the tailored English language course she was pursuing. Muntaha eluded to the same idea, arguing that "*the one size fits all language courses in the West do not help that*

*much. I mean, I'm not interested in improving my everyday vocabulary and socializing in English language. As you know, **I chose** to study a specific English course (Business and Management Course) that has clear objectives and aims here in Saudi Arabia.*" In terms of the level of investment, several women took actions to create a context of learning to maximize their investment by investing their time and energy in learning English. Rawabi, for example, mentioned that the women in the group agreed on "English only" while in school, and some went further to communicate in English among themselves even when they were away from school. They created a WhatsApp group. Afaf jokingly mentioned that *"I'm a good student. I've never neglected homework or an assignment,"* showing her deep level of investment. Noura mentioned that she started a new habit of reading English newspapers and magazines and kept a vocabulary booklet for herself. The others showed their agency by either exerting little effort in learning the language (i.e., Nouf), who expressed resentment to her teacher for pushing her to do certain language exercises and homework, or by choosing not to pursue what they called *"brand name English certifications."* By that, the women referred to their refusal to pursue FCE, KET, PET, among others. Various rationales were given for such refusals, ranging from beliefs that such certifications *"are a scam to get more money from you"* (Nouf), or that such certificates *"aren't needed in my case because I'm not planning to apply to anything, I just want to be able to communicate in English"* (Rawabi). Two of the participants showed their agency by insisting on getting such certifications (e.g., Faten and Muntaha). They explained their position:

I need these certifications [CAE and IELTS] because they will, on one hand, enable me to be a more proficient writer and help me secure a doctoral acceptance... I don't believe that they are a luxury in my opinion (Faten).

I have successfully finished the BEC Preliminary- CEFR Level B1 certificate; and I'm enrolled in the Business Vantage- CEFR Level B2 certificate now, and I intend to continue. They are a must for me if I want to fight to claim what I believe should have been mine – the promotion we spoke of (Muntaha).

One of the most agentic investment actions is the investment in certain language skills. Several women indicated that they are interested in speaking and

building their vocabulary, which is what they asked for in their classrooms. Nouf commented, *“Why do I need grammar and writing? I want to understand people and people understand me, so that’s what I wanted them to teach me.”* Others showed interest in other language skills. Eiman, for example, was interested in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and presentations skills, while Faten was interested in academic writing and research skills. Zayna and Salwa were very invested in scientific jargon and academic writing, while Faiza was interested in writing and colloquial English since she is very active online. This type of agency shows how the Saudi women were pulling away from the typical image of Saudi women that is submissive and powerless, towards the image of a woman who is taking charge of her own education by making her own decisions. One of the questions related to this particular discussion is whether or not the women had the permission of their husbands/legal guardians or their advice before choosing a course. Generally, most of them accepted advice, but not the permission of their husbands/guardians. Almost all of the women made their decisions after consulting with other women who had been through a similar experience or whom they had met while studying.

Agency was also present in refusing certain components of the English language teaching process. For example, Abrar refused the Target Language (TL) cultural component of her lessons and campaigned with other women to have that component replaced with a more suitable Islamic/Arabic one. Nouf refused the accent reduction techniques offered by her teacher, and mentioned that *“she [the teacher] insisted that I pronounce like an American; and I insisted that I don’t need that. I will pronounce the way I pronounce; after all, I’m not an American and I don’t want to be.”* When she was asked about the reasons for resisting, she stopped and corrected me by saying, *“You see it as a resistance, I see it as my right to pronounce the way I wish...as long as I’m understood, I’m fine.”*

## **5.7 Learning English as a Site of Struggle**

Learning English as a site of struggle is the second emergent theme in this thesis. Throughout the discussions with the Saudi women, I sensed that learning English as a foreign language was a site of struggle for most of them, and that the struggle appeared in forms other than learning the form and structure of the



language. One of the most visible struggles seemed to be that some women were tormented by the idea that their return on investment could be higher than what they had experienced. Some of the women, despite their free decision to study English in Saudi Arabia, made it clear that if the economic and social factors had not been an obstacle they would have preferred to study English abroad for the sake of “*authenticity of the language*” (Afaf). Muntaha discussed the matter from the perspective of “*cost of opportunity*”:

There is a principal of cost of opportunity here, which is the difference in return between a chosen investment and one that has been passed up. What I mean is that the return on investment for learning English in Saudi Arabia within the resources I have is good; but I believe that it might have been better if I went abroad.

Afaf and Muntaha provided clear examples of language learning being a site of struggle between their desire for better encounters with English in the West and the financial constraints for studying in KSA. Other participants commented that learning English was a site of struggle for them because of their colleagues in the course. According to Abrar,

It was very hard for me to concentrate on my lessons on my old school simply because there was this group of women who came to socialize; and they refused to abide by the EOP (English Only Policy)... the catastrophe is that they utilized the class time to teach our teacher Arabic rather than learning English.

Feeling that her investment in learning English was jeopardized by this group of women, she made the hard decision to leave the school and look for another one. As a repercussion to this action, she was deemed “not serious” about her goals. Another struggle was caused by unsuccessful language learning experiences. The older participants commented that their experiences with learning English at public school first, and then at local universities and colleges later, by “unqualified English teachers” made them develop an “*indifference towards the language*” (Nouf). They wanted to learn the language, but still felt a resistance to fully neglecting their past experiences and embracing the language. Another example of the struggle with learning the language stemmed from the women’s Islamic beliefs. Several of the participants indicated that they found it hard to accept some of the Western ideals featured in the curricula. Finally, Fozia, the

Islamic studies teacher, who describes herself as “*individualistic and shy, but bold and strong behind the keyboard*,” provided another example. Fozia struggled with her personality that she felt minimized her benefits from the classes. She confessed that because of her personality she stayed away from group work or discussions, and that part of her investment in English was to break away from such a personality. Fozia described her situation in the classroom:

You can describe me as the “absent-present”... I mean, physically I’m in class, but not part of it. However, I store every single word. I prefer if I have to ask to ask alone, either in break or after the other ladies leave... I hope by time I can change this part of my personality.

## 5.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provided a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the data collected from different perspectives. I combined the thematic analysis from the interviews and the statistical results from the questionnaire to report the findings according to the research questions. The Saudi women’s perspectives on the status of English in Saudi Arabia, and as it pertains to women in Saudi Arabia, were examined. Generally, they were all in favor of teaching English, but some challenged the high importance given to English in the Saudi society. In addition, many factors were found influencing the Saudi women’s decisions to pursue English in Saudi Arabia, in contrast to pursuing other languages or pursuing English abroad. The factors were described as being push and pull factors, and they were viewed differently by the different participants. The data also revealed that Saudi women in this study were agentive in their pursuit of learning English. The data eschewed the Western feminism image of Saudi women as being submissive, secondary, and subject to male hegemony in a male-dominated society, though the women were also portrayed as agents acting with free will. Furthermore, the data showed that Islam is the baseline for the Saudi women’s agency and identity, and the Saudi women’s agency is not an agency of confinement, but of compliance. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the major themes that emerged from the data. The chapter is divided into five main themes: 1) the English language situation in Saudi Arabia, 2) Islam and English in Saudi Arabia, 3) Saudi women and access to English, 4) EFL and Saudi women's identity, and 5) EFL and acts/possibilities of agency. Because these themes are interconnected, some degree of overlap is unavoidable.

### 6.2 The English Language Situation in Saudi Arabia: Linguistic Imperialism or Linguistic Pragmatism?

Although English is not spread everywhere in the world, today, by virtue of explicit colonialism, English is considered as an aspect of the post-colonial world. Pennycook (1998) argued that teaching English was once "at the heart of colonialism," and it is now "deeply interwoven with the discourses of colonialism" (p. 2). In reviewing the literature on the spread of English, two specific lenses have been used: *linguistic imperialism* and *linguistic pragmatism*, and this was quite evident from the narratives in chapter 5 and the various studies conducted in Saudi Arabia and MENA region in chapter 3. According to Phillipson's (1992) linguistic imperialism, "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (p. 47). This eventually leads to "an asymmetric relationship between producers and consumers that is internalized as natural, normative, and essential," which in turn leads to a "heteroglossic (hierarchical) arrangement of languages, pervaded by hegemonic value judgments, material and symbolic investments, and ideologies that represent interests only of those in power" (Bhatt, 2001, p. 532). In contrast, linguistic pragmatism argues that the "success of the spread of English, tied to the economic conditions that created the commercial supremacy of the United Kingdom and the United States, is guaranteed under the econocultural model by linguistic pragmatism not linguistic imperialism" (Bhatt, 2001, p. 533). This perspective sees that globalizations, advancement of technology, international trade and the need to communicate

globally necessitated and facilitated the spread of English. Against this theoretical backdrop is the question: Did English spread in Saudi Arabia by virtue of imperialism or pragmatism? Based on the findings reported here and the stories of the participants, and based on my experience as an English instructor in Saudi Arabia for more than a decade, English seems to have been significantly spread via linguistic pragmatism, and to a lesser degree by linguistic imperialism, as illustrated by one of the participant's critical understanding and refusal to equate the spread of English in Saudi Arabia with imperialistic powers; and the reported instrumentality of English on the lives of the participants.

I developed a three-level model (Figure 6.1) (with macro, meso, and micro levels) to explain the spread of English, which showcases the imperialistic and pragmatic spread of English in Saudi Arabia.



Figure 6.1: Levels of the spread of English in Saudi Arabia.

The macro national and societal changes, representing the rapid transformation of post-oil discovery Saudi Arabia (Alkhathlan, 2013) from a culturally homogenous, primarily tribal society, into an urban, industrialized society, increasingly open to the West and operating within an econocultural model, has contributed to the popularity of English in Saudi Arabia by virtue of the increasing demand on technologies and the need for a common language to communicate with the outside world. The second level, the meso level of changes in foreign language education policies (e.g., introducing English at schools from grade 4, adopting EMI at Saudi universities, changing the English curricula, and other initiatives), has also led to the increasing importance of English in Saudi Arabia. Al-Seghayer (2005) highlighted that, while it is not clear how English was brought into

Saudi education, “it was the Saudi government that undertook the initial steps in introducing English to its people” (p. 125) and it maintained English as the primary foreign language in the Kingdom. The term ‘foreign language’, referred to by the Saudi Arabia educational policy, for example, is synonymous with English. Moreover, the post-9/11 US criticism of the Saudi educational system and the Kingdom’s desire to counter a terrorist image of Saudis and create a knowledge-based community that can smoothly transition to the post-oil era has led to drastic changes in the Saudi curricula and English language offerings at schools. These features have also led to adopting EMI at colleges and universities that helped to give English the eminent status it enjoys today in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the micro level of language usage by social groups and individuals in Saudi Arabia contributed to the trend that made English the most valued, desired, and studied foreign language in the country. This can be seen from the participants’ opinions that English is a vehicle for modernization and globalization, and from many studies that have found English to be “a catalyst of progress for the country” (Al-Zubeiry, 2012, p. 17), and the language of power, knowledge, and modernity (Habbash & Troudi, 2015).

The data from this study corroborates Kachru’s (1990) comment that the power of language is derived from “the domains of its use, the roles its users can play, and – attitudinally – above all, how others view its importance” (pp. 1- 4). Like other authors who investigated the use of English in Saudi Arabia, this study argues that certain functional domains of the language give prominence to the language, and “the more important a domain is, the more ‘powerful’ a language becomes” (Kachru, 1990, p. 2). English in Saudi Arabia is a performance language that is considered to be more ‘serviceable’ than other languages “for certain functions” (Honey, 1997, p. 20). Nevertheless, the widespread use of English is not natural without some repercussions. For example, in their study of the discourse of global English and the way it is represented in Saudi Arabia, Habbash and Troudi (2015) showed how Arabic has been limited to the role of teaching religion and social sciences. Al-Jarf (2008) found that 96% of the participants in her study considered English to be a superior language to Arabic because they think the world has become a small village and English is the dominant language and the language of communication in the global village; an opinion that some of the

participants' relate to. These findings are in contrast to those posited by Payne and Almansour (2014): "Language planning in Saudi Arabia has been developed around maintaining Arabic culture and language" (p. 330), and the Saudi education policy has included five articles (numbers 24, 46, 50, 114, 140) on language policy stipulating that Arabic should be the language of instruction at all schooling levels in public institutions so as to enrich Arabic. Al-Dhubaib (2006, cited in Habbash & Troudi, 2015) emphatically explained that the problems with Arabic in Saudi Arabia and the widespread use of English "are a product of a sense of exaggerated importance of the English language, which is often a result of fascination with what is Western" (p. 69). This opinion is also held by those who exaggerate the adverse effects of English. In this study, the participants who were aware of the various effects of acquiring English, on themselves, their children, and the Saudi society in general, made it clear that English as a tool cannot be blamed.

The increasing impact of English in Saudi Arabia has not gone unnoticed, but has provoked much discussion and debate. The results suggest the presence of a schism among women regarding the importance of English in Saudi Arabia. Some women, as argued by Faruk (2013), take the importance of English for granted; whereas, others critically reflect on the importance and argue against exaggerating the importance. One of the arguments is that an exaggerated importance given to English creates a socio-cultural gulf between those who can speak the language and those who cannot. It may also create a false sense of elitism, a sentiment expressed by Phillipson (2009) who spoke of "the various ways English co-articulates with elitism" (p. 43). One of the findings in this study is that a sense of elitism was apparent from the data in this study when the women reported their preference for connecting with bilingual, rather than monolingual, Saudi women (see chapter 5).

Another interesting finding was the alignment between proficiency in English and building a sense of national pride. Saudi Arabia launched a "Saudization Policy" that seeks to employ Saudis in various sectors in the country to minimize the dependency on foreign workers. Several studies (e.g., Al-Ajaji, 1995; Khorshid, 2004; Ramady, 2010; Sadi, 2013) revealed that a mastery in English is an essential building block to build a sense of national pride through Saudization. The EF English Proficiency Index of companies (2013) reported on this alignment by

stating that “Saudi Arabia’s English proficiency level has deteriorated dramatically, which may reflect the recent ‘Saudization’ policies designed to considerably reduce the number of expatriates in the workforce” (p. 16).

Saudi Arabia is no “Tower of Babel,” and Arabic is the sole official language, with English being the first foreign language. The macro, meso, and micro levels, discussed earlier, stand behind the uncontested status of English in Saudi Arabia, and the enhanced language awareness among Saudis that has shaped their attitudes towards English. Officially, little appetite exists to adopt or introduce other foreign languages to Saudi Arabia and the public seems to be reluctant to challenge the official policies regarding foreign language teaching. Nevertheless, not everyone in Saudi Arabia is convinced of the importance being bestowed on English, and some even believe that people can survive well enough in their own countries without needing to use English (Seargeant, 2009).

### **6.3 Islam and English in Saudi Arabia**

Payne and Almansour (2014) argued that in Saudi Arabia, where “religion... is regarded as the bedrock of all educational decisions” (Jamjoom, 2010, p. 547), “The introduction of any other language could be seen as an introduction to another religion, and consequently a threat to Islam and the status of Arabic in the country” (p. 330); and this has been discussed in chapter two when discussing the two mainstreams concerned with English and Islam. One of the most cited papers that discusses English in Saudi Arabia is by Al-Abed Al-Haq and Smadi (1996a), who measured the attitudes of 1,176 Saudi university students from all of the Saudi universities. The study not only reported positive attitudes towards the language, but also that some participants considered learning language to be a national and religious duty. In a country like Saudi Arabia, religion is not inherently separable from other spheres of activity (Liddicoat, 2012), especially teaching and learning English. Several of the narratives reported in this study allude to the beliefs held by older generation Saudis that “English is also seen by many as being the embodiment and carrier of Judeo-Christian cultural values, and that of Western civilization, and conjures various images” (Mohd-Asraf, 2005, p.104). This is a major point of discussion between the Saudi women who are learning English and their family members who exhibit attitudinal resistance to learning English, because

of what they think it represents. In any case, the participants seem to understand the value of English as indicated by Malak (2005):

Muslim narratives in English prove that the English language, despite all its colonial evocations and its atavistically anti-Muslim connotation, can be utilized as a sophisticated Muslim currency of credible communications... English is in the process of being transformed from an Islamophobic to an Islamophile language (p. 7-8).

The debate around “more English, less Islam” (Charise, 2007) can be summarized in the three attitudinal positions identified by Rahman (2005), which can be traced back to the narratives of the participants in this study: resistance and rejection; acceptance and assimilation; and pragmatic utilization. Rahman (2005) showed that the rejection of English is based on religious thinking, though it may not be theological. The second attitude (acceptance and assimilation), according to Rahman (2005), is said to stem from modernism and the need to assimilate in the global market. The third and final position (pragmatic utilization) denotes the acceptance of “aspects of it selectively, tactically as it were, in order to empower one’s self while maintaining one’s identity as firmly as one could” (p. 123). The data from this study corroborates the findings of Rahman (2005), though the most visible positions are the first and third. It should also be noted that the women’s narratives denounced the role of English as a language that threatens the Islamic way of life in Saudi Arabia; clearly alienating the negative influences of English on Islamic beliefs and their identity, and simultaneously imbuing Arabic with divine attributes from the language of the Quran. These results are in contrast to the literature that argues that English operates as a threat (Charise, 2007) and is battling with Islam (Karmani, 2005), or is competing with the Arabic language (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011).

Macro national and societal changes, the meso-level changes in language policies in the Kingdom, and the micro-level individual use of the language point to two distinct Islamic discourses in discussing the relationship between learning English and Saudi women. The first discourse is the *revivalist Islamic discourse* (Masud, 2009), which calls for a revival of the practices of the first three generations of Islam. This discourse was evident among the older Saudi women’s conservative opinion that was in fierce opposition to learning English as being an



un-Islamic practice that would lead to adverse effects among the women, their families, and in society in general. The other Islamic discourse, the *Islamic modernism discourse* (Masud, 2009), which aims to root modernism in Islamic tradition, was used by the participants in terms of Islamic scriptures to rationalize their decisions to learn English. Quamar (2015) clarified that “Saudi Arabia witnesses a complex process of transition and goes through a steady phase of reforms” (p. 82), the most recent of which was the appointing of new members to the Supreme Judiciary Council and the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars who are described as ‘moderate’. Nevertheless, Islam on its own cannot be regarded as the single driving force for the conundrum of *Islamizing English* or *Anglicizing Islam* in Saudi Arabia since other factors also influence the relationship between Islam and English. Thus, given the universality of the message of Islam, Mohd-Asraf (2005) suggested:

It is important to underscore the point that despite the conflict, or discord, as perceived by some Muslims, between Islamic values and some of the Western values as conveyed through English, it is considered desirable, in the Islamic worldview, to learn other languages and to know and appreciate the differences among various communities (p.115).

#### **6.4 Saudi Women and Access to English**

Grown, Gupta, and Khan (2003) proposed three domains of equality between men and women: “capabilities, access to resources and opportunities, and agency or the ability to influence and contribute to the outcome” (p. 3). The data in this study indicates a considerable debate on the disparity between men and women in Saudi Arabia in terms of access to linguistic resources (i.e., English). Unlike the plethora of studies investigating the issue of gender and access to linguistic resources (e.g., Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Goldstein, 2001), including unequal gender relations (Pavlenko & Pilar, 2001), restricted mobility and financial dependence (Warriner, 2004), the threat of sexual harassment (Ehrlich, 2001), educational and employment opportunities (Goldstein, 2001; Menard-Warwick, 2004), and motherhood (Kouritzin, 2000) that act as barriers to the immigrant women’s access to linguistic resources, the Saudi women in this study

reported no such obstacles. With regards to the Saudi women, the issue of access to linguistic resources presented itself in two ways: 1) the societal structures and institutions that still glorify men's phronesis over women's, and 2) the level of access to linguistic resources.

In Saudi Arabia, gender inequality is evident and usually translated into a power imbalance between men and women, with women being more vulnerable. Doumato (2010) proposed that the power imbalance between men and women in Saudi Arabia is not specifically stated in the laws of the country, but rather, it is embedded in the social and government structures and practices, such as the extreme fatwa or religious edicts that have a heavy impact on the governmental treatment of women in public policies. In fact, the Basic Law of Governance in Saudi Arabia (article 8) stipulates that "The system of governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on justice, consultation and equality according to the Islamic Sharia." Article 22, for example, states that, "Economic and social development shall be achieved in accordance with a systematic and fair plan"; while the other articles do not distinguish between genders. Nevertheless, the status quo is different for the discriminative general model of education that still upholds discriminative gender roles and assigns women a stature that is below that of men (Wallerstein, 2009). Saudi Arabia seems to operate on the principle of "equal, but different," but the prevalent practice suggests that Saudi Arabia still treats women as legal minors. Al-Rasheed (2013) eloquently explained this by saying:

While other Muslim women are treated as legal persons, Saudi women remain under the guardianship of their male relatives, who control their mobility, marriage, work, and education (p. 15).

Another angle could be the understanding of linguistic capital as a source of material capital, so that male institutions would interpret women's desire to learn English as a linguistic resource and a sign of their competition with men for jobs. This point was highlighted in the high percentage of respondents who believed that learning English is instrumental to finding jobs in Saudi Arabia (Chapter 5).

Additionally, one of the significant issues is that of the level of access. The access to English as a linguistic resource has been established; however, Saudi women have a limited access. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) explained that

“Within major institutions, gender emerges as not simply in institutional structure, but in the balances of activities that take place on a day-to-day basis” (p. 43). In other words, certain institutions (usually controlled by men, as discussed in chapter 2) in Saudi Arabia safeguard English proficiency because it sets them apart from others, and at the same time, they use English to create insurmountable barriers against those who might want to benefit from the linguistic resource. Faten and Muntaha clearly demonstrated this sentiment. Faten’s endeavors were hindered by other women faculty members, and Muntaha’s ambition was crippled by male figures at her workplace who refused to be subordinates of a woman.

Several narratives referred to a *gender-specific set of skills*, supported by the second-quarter report of the Labor Force Survey (General Authority of Statistics, 2016). Only 16.6% of the workforce was comprised of Saudi women, compared to 83.4% being comprised of men; a statistic that is not commensurate with the educational output. Islam (2014) discussed women’s education and employment, and found that 95% of employed women were in the public sector, and 85% of them were working in the education sector (teaching and administration), while 6% were in public health and 4% were in administration (p. 77). The limiting of women’s access to linguistic resources further defines their *gender-defined skills*.

## **6.5 EFL and Saudi Women’s Identity**

This study explored the impact of learning English as a foreign language on the identity of Saudi women. Social identity theories suggest that every human is comprised of different facets (ethnicity, social class, nationality, family, sub-culture membership, etc.), which make us who we are. The data from this study; however, revealed that certain categories bear a greater weight in identity formation than others. For example, being born in a Muslim country and being raised in accordance with Islamic values, and being educated in Saudi Arabia led the participating women to develop an Islamic and Saudi national identity that they considered as a strong foundation for their identity. It cannot easily be displaced simply by learning a foreign language. The *mélange* of religion, historical social history, and multiple desires undoubtedly influenced their investment in learning English and had an impact on their identities. I argue here that learning English *per se* does not trigger identity change, but the decision of the women to draw on

English as an identity resource is used to assert that they are more than what society ascribes to them. By learning English, the participating women were using English not only for acquiring and exchanging information, but for continuously negotiating and renegotiating their positions and identities.

Discussing the impact of English on Saudi women's identity follows the "cultural supermarket" (Mathews, 2000) model where individuals have various possibilities to assume a range of identities. This corroborates Omoniyi and White's (2006) assertion that identity is not fixed, but rather constructed within established and varying contexts that are defined by a myriad of social variables. For instance, identity is "embedded in larger social, political, economic, and cultural systems" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p.10). Thus, individuals do not develop their identities in a vacuum, but rather, within a matrix of environments and institutions that both affect and are affected by them. McCarthy and Moje (2002) wrote, "It seems that we are trying to work through how identities are coherent, yet hybrid and stabilizing, yet dynamic" (p. 232). The access and exposure to, and knowledge of English had an impact on the Saudi women's identities.

### 6.5.1 EFL and multiple selves.

Blommaert (2005) accentuated the need to consider and differentiate between subject positions that are 'self-constructed' or 'imposed':

Whenever we talk about identity, we need to differentiate between 'achieved' or 'inhabited' identity – the identity people themselves articulate or claim – and 'ascribed' or 'attributed' identity – the identity given to someone by someone else (p. 238).

Perhaps one of the best models of identity that accounts for the interplay between the dynamic yet stable nature of identity is Taylor's (2010, 2013a, 2013b) quadripolar model of identity that sees identity as a "composite notion characterized by two self-dimensions (possible/actual and internal/external) resulting in four components of the self system" (Taylor et al., 2013, p. 5).<sup>21</sup> Taylor

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<sup>21</sup> According to this model, **possible selves** denote the future states of self that originate inside and outside the individual. They come in two forms: ideal and imposed. The ideal denotes "a personal representation of what an individual would like to become in the future, irrespective of other people's desires and expectations about the individual" (Taylor, 2013, p. 42). The imposed self, on the other hand, is defined as "representations of other people's hopes, desires, and

(2013a) argued that “An environment that allows individuals the freedom to be themselves, that values them for what they are, that encourages the expression of true feelings and experiences would be an environment in which one’s private self would move naturally towards one’s ideal self” (p. 47). Still, the status quo of Saudi women can be described as “private selves in detention” since the conformity to the religious discourses required of them prevents their natural movement to their ideal selves. In Saudi Arabia, women’s public selves are largely controlled by their families’ imposed selves. The data in this study shows how the participants look at English as part of their ideal selves, based on their understanding of their private selves as capable learners. Their understanding of their private selves includes an understanding of the religious and national discourses that try to paint them with the same brush and assign them a simpler subjectivity.

Some of the narratives revealed a gap between the participants’ private and ideal selves, and how learning English is a step towards bridging that gap. The women, however, reported many societal, religiously-infused impediments to their quest that I interpret as being an attempt to curb the creation of their L2-enabled gendered selves. Interestingly, the participants have shown duplicitous selves in their process of learning English: internally, they tried to reduce the discrepancy between their private and ideal selves, while externally, they were complying with the private and imposed selves being placed on them. For example, the women who were studying English to better represent their private selves as bilingual Saudi women, at the same time were complying with the imposed selves being placed on them to learn English only for the sake of rearing children.

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expectations of what an individual should achieve, the number of such representations depends on the number of social relational contexts in which the individual function” (p. 45). **Actual selves**, in contrast to the possible selves that delineate the individual’s future self, “cover the dynamics of one’s present-day identity (which are) also divided into two: the private and the public selves. A private self can be understood as “a person’s intimate representation of his/her present attributes, which may or may not be disclosed in social interaction” (p. 46). The private self stems from the individual’s understanding of who they are (their subjectivity) and what they believe they can do (their sense of agency). This involves an understanding of their identity NOW and how it should influence their ideal identity. Public selves, on the other hand, are the “various social presentations that a person may display depending on the relational context and audience” (p. 48). Taylor explained that given the social nature of human beings and their need to belong and have social acceptance, “a person’s public selves will be directly related to one’s imposed selves” (Taylor, 2013).

The women exemplified “strategic identity switches” (Vasilopoulos, 2015), at times minimizing their L2 learner identity and conforming to the prevalent societal and familial discourses so as not to offend or disturb the balance of powers, but at the same time, maximizing the same identity to push back against the essentialist perspectives held by their teachers on Saudi women. By comparing this study to others dealing with Saudi women’s identity and learning English (e.g., Alsweel, 2013), I argue that the impact of learning English in Saudi Arabia does not bring about identity changes as it does in the TL culture.

### **6.5.2 Indexicality and identity.**

How does the theory of indexicality play a role in manifesting identity? In this thesis, indexicality denotes “the function of language that points to an aspect of the social dimension” (Cook, 2008, p. 1). De Fina (2016) elaborated on the definition of indexicality saying that it refers to “the ability of linguistic elements that include single sounds, words, and combinations of resources to evoke particular associations with identities” (p. 170). In their L1, the Saudi participants’ Islamic identity was strongly associated with the repetition of certain words and phrases, such as “In sha’a Allah [God willing],” “Subhan Allah [praise the Lord],” and “Alhamdulillah [thank God],” among other expressions. De Fina (2016) indicated that linguistic utterances can reveal group association, a way of life, or a system of belief that was evident in the women’s use of pronouns such as “us,” to denote Saudi women, “them,” referring to Saudi men, older Saudi women, or the patriarchal system, and “those women,” to refer to Saudi women who, in their opinion, learn English for the wrong reasons. Silverstein (2003) spoke of language learners trying to establish a *second order indexicality* in their “attempt to approximate stylistically or phonetically to the standard in an effort to index an aspirant high-status identity for themselves” (p. 219). Traces of this can be found in the women’s desire to learn from native speaker teachers rather than from non-natives, but at the same time, some women showed their resistance to such indexing by refusing to emulate the standard, feeling that it deprived them of their true identity. Bucholtz (2009) explained that,

In an indexical theory of style, the social meaning of linguistic forms is most fundamentally a matter not of social categories such as gender,

ethnicity, age, or region but rather of subtler and more fleeting interactional moves through which speakers take stances, create alignments, and construct personas (p. 147).

Following Du Bois (2007), I argue that the adoption of English as a linguistic form in the Saudi society by the women indicated their epistemic and evaluative positioning, with an attempt to align themselves with other powerful subjects who possess linguistic capital. Du Bois (2007) explained this succinctly:

Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field (p. 163).

### **6.5.3 Epistemic manifestation of identity.**

Another dimension also seemed to play a pivotal role in shaping the women's identity in Saudi Arabia; which was an extension of the earlier discussion on subjectivity. The dimension is that of the epistemologies adopted by Saudi women, which is known as *women's ways of knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, & Goldberger, 1986). This theory is relevant to my discussion of identity because, according to the theory, what women consider to be the truth and reality affects how they see the world around them, and their own self-perception, among other things. Belenky et al. (1986) identified five epistemological perspectives by which women know and view the world: 1) silence, 2) subjective knowing, 3) received knowing, 4) procedural knowing, and 5) constructed knowing. The most salient epistemologies in this study are mixtures of the subjective and procedural knowing of women. The subjective knowing of women occurs when they perceive truth and knowledge as being personal and subjective rather than as essentialist. In their quest to learn English, the participants developed an inner voice that went against the teachings of the authority, and by learning English they ensured that their voices were heard. Belenky et al. (1986) argued that subjective women recognize the choice between their needs of self and of others, but their path towards realizing these needs of self is not a smooth one. Belenky et al. (1986) argued that:

The instability and flux that subjective women experiment when they contemplate their future is due, in part, to the lack of grounding in a

secure, integrated, and enduring self-concept. Whereas, in the position of received knowledge, women derive a sense of “who I am” from the definition others supply and the roles they fill. Subjective women shift away from this perspective and experience a wrenching away of the familiar contexts and relationships within which the old identity has been embedded (p. 81).

Belenky et al. (1986) stated that subjective knowers often block out conflicting opinions of others, but may seek the support and affirmation of those in agreement. This is true in the case of the Saudi women in this study; however, they also show certain traits of the procedural knowing of identity where they exhibit stronger self-concepts that translate to a greater tendency to speak out against essentialism and imposed selves. In particular, the women exhibited the separate knowing identity, which occurs as a part of procedural knowing; the other part is connected knowing. Separate knowing of self requires a sense of detachment and critical thinking, and it may also necessitate arguing, debating, and playing the devil’s advocate. Gallotti, Clinchy, Ainsworth, Lavin, and Mansfield (1999) explained that an individual’s epistemological approach affects their attitude towards the learning process rather than the amount of learning that occurs.

Separate knowing, on the other hand, requires a sense of detachment for use in critical thinking, the scientific method, and textual analysis. This may take an adversarial tone, involving argument, debate, playing the devil’s advocate, or shooting holes in another’s position. The separate knower is the doubter; for instance, the one who looks for flaws in reasoning, examines arguments with a critical eye, or plays the devil’s advocate. In this study, the women were aware that the silent women in their society “relied on what others told them about themselves to get any sense of self” (Blenkey et al., 1986, p. 31), which is why they strategically embraced the subjective and separate procedural knowing epistemology to fight back by learning English.

Finally, identity construction, or change in identity, is a complex social process that not only involves the ways in which individuals perceive themselves, but also their perception of others. Canagarajah (2004) indicated a “struggle for voice in relation to the selfhood imposed by macro-social and extra-linguistic constructs” and that this conflict is between “instinct and institution” where “institutions represent established or preordained selves that are historically,



socially, and ideologically established. Taking on these selves results in a form of silencing” (p. 268).

## **6.6 EFL and Acts/Possibilities of Agency**

Bakhtin (1986) argued that, “The better a person understands the degree to which he is externally determined... the closer to home he comes to understanding and exercising his real freedom” (p. 139). This statement gives prominence to the role of consciousness in understanding oneself as a social being and as mediated through language practices. In this study, several narratives exhibited that the participants’ ability to analyze their respective contexts and interpret their surroundings established the foundation for their agency. This study briefly examined the possibilities of agency in a context where agency is mostly limited by a system of religious interpretations, the patriarchy, imposed selves, and a battery of public restrictive measurements. The narratives in this study abound with examples of acts and possibilities for agency.

The narratives show how the women reflected about their lived experiences and decided how the role of English would play out in their social position or relationship. For example, several women commented about how their lack of knowledge or proper knowledge of English was an impediment before their careers began progressing, which led them to learn English. Others decided that English was instrumental for their social location as mothers, wives, or fiancées. Other acts of agency were manifested when the Saudi women decried being devoid of agency in that they seemed to have no control over what was being taught to them in general, which instigated them to study English in Saudi Arabia and choose the courses that they deemed to be the most appropriate. Establishing study groups, developing special chat rooms where they could practice English, and resisting the essentialist views of Western teachers were some of the many acts that were seen to be assertions of their agency.

With regards to the discussion of Saudi women’s agency in the simplistic notion of the “either/or” (i.e., either resist or embrace the societal, cultural, and religious forms, practices, and structure, where resistance denotes agency and acceptance denotes lack thereof), it was not present in this study. The women seemed to fathom how to differently position themselves within their social milieu

and negotiate the constraints they encountered to gain a degree of control and make decisions and act in meaningful ways. The participants both disputed and appropriated certain practices as acts of agency.

Madhok (2013) explained: “However, of course, it is not only the performance of actions that accounts within accounts of agency; persons are also expected to uphold certain values in their actions” (p. 40). This brings us to the link between Islam and women’s agency. This relationship is manifested by the *compliant agency* introduced in Chapter 5.

### **6.6.1 Compliant agency.**

From my discussion with the Saudi women participants, they seemed to be cognizant of their social and familial roles and duties and of the gendered roles they were required to follow, and how these roles and duties were a part of who they were. At the same time, they tried to eschew the image of being confined by the roles and duties and explained that their actions stemmed from an understanding of how compliance and agency are not contradictory. Several narratives spoke of how the participants successfully created spaces for meaningful agency, and at the same time, they how they could comply with Sharia and societal norms and duties.

Saba Mahmood (2001, 2005), who introduced the notion of pious agency, asked,

How do we conceive individual freedom in a context where the distinction between the subject’s own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be easily presumed; and where submission of certain forms of [external] authority is a condition of achieving the subjects’ potentiality? (2005, p. 31).

In this study, the answer came in the form of “agency maneuvers,” where the participants willfully subjected themselves to the ideas and practices of their society, considered by feminist scholars as subordination, on one hand. On the other hand, the participants resisted and strategically exercised their agency so as to comply with society norms and Sharia’s parameters. This agency of compliance is significant for two reasons: 1) it eschews the Western construct of the notion of agency that assumes that “people have access to choice and have the rationality

and freedom to make decisions and exercise agency” (Parker, 2005, p. 9), and it solidifies the fact that different cultural contexts construct agency in different forms, which was corroborated by Parker (2005) who noted that, in Indonesia, passivity is a form of agency; and 2) the agency maneuvers performed by the participants can be used to point to the false Western accusations of victimhood and marginalization of Muslim women, estranging the idea that agency is only synonymous with resistance. Abu-Lughod (1990) called this interpretation of agency (i.e., resistance) a “tendency to romanticize resistance,” which would “read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated” (p. 42).

Ahearn (2006) posited: “[while] one can certainly understand the impulse behind equating agency with resistance, agency should not be reduced to it. Oppositional agency is only one of many forms of agency” (p. 115). Ortner (2001) complemented the notion of oppositional agency by introducing a second agency modality that she referred to as “agency of intention-of projects, purposes, desires” (p. 79), which is a notion of agency that is “centered more on the subjective individual’s projects and desires” (VandenBroek, 2010, p. 486). In this study, it was clear that the exercise of agency was not completely instigated by the women’s desire to oppose the hegemonic powers, but it also emerged from their needs, wants, and aspirations. Moreover, this agency was manifested through culturally meaningful and highly prized ways.

## **6.7 Summary of the Chapter**

The data suggests that the Saudi women participants were engaged in a constant renegotiation and repositioning process of their subjectivities to attain and benefit from English as a linguistic resource. Moreover, their efforts opened up avenues for them to negotiate their identities as ‘Saudi Muslim Women’.

Consciously, by adhering to Islam and being sincere about their roles as Saudi women, the participants chose to present themselves to their family, culture, and the outside world in a way that refuted the long-standing Western essentialist image of imprisoned women who await their emancipation. From poststructuralist

and Islamic feminist perspectives, language learners are considered as compliant agents “in taking charge of their own learning.” Agency is:

... the key factor in their learning: in many cases they may decide to learn the second, or any additional, language only to the extent that it allows them to be proficient, without the consequences of losing the old and adopting the new ways of being in the world (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 293).

The Saudi women in this study comfortably fit this description as they constantly negotiated their position to retain the parts of their identities that they value the most while being open to other subjectivities. The access and exposure to, and knowledge of English had clearly influenced the participants. The relationship between their religion, identities, L2 learning, structures of Saudi society, and their multiple personal desires and histories shaped their investment in English. To the participants, learning English represented an investment in change – for them, their families, and society as a whole.

## **Chapter 7: Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this study, I listened to many stories from Saudi women and in the process I have tried to consider their perspectives to understand the relationship between learning English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia and its impact on the identities of Saudi women. My aim has also been to understand the discourses on investing in English as a foreign language and the opportunities of agency that are available to Saudi women in their quest to acquire English. In this chapter, I reflect on the findings in regards to the relationship between EFL and the identity and sense of agency of Saudi women. I also reflect on the potential value of the findings for those involved in second language education and research. I consider the possible implications of the findings for the participants, for language educators and policy makers, and for second language theorists and those interested in linking language theories to the realities of learning English in EFL contexts. In addition, I consider the implications for those who are interested in researching Saudi women per se.

### **7.2 Revisiting the Research Questions**

**Question 1. What are female Saudi EFL learners' views regarding the status of English in Saudi Arabia in general, and the status of English as it relates to Saudi women?**

The findings indicate that English in Saudi Arabia is highly prized and considered a key for employment and economic prosperity for individuals. Despite the consensus for its importance to Saudis and Saudi society, the magnitude of its importance and possible exaggeration have been heavily debated. The participants were aware of the instrumentality of English in Saudi Arabia, and despite its widespread use, they denounced labelling it as a 'second language', instead insisting that it be considered as a 'foreign language'. As for the importance of English to Saudi women per se, the quantitative data showed an overwhelming belief that English is pivotal to Saudi women. Several women spoke about what English meant to them personally, as a means to better themselves, reveal their ideas, gain independence, and foster their social inclusion. The data also revealed

that learning English did not negatively affect the social image of the Saudi women. The qualitative data; however, eschewed the idea of English being especially important to Saudi women, because (a) if true, this would confirm the Western essentialist image of Saudi women as being suppressed and liberated by Western tools such as English, and (b) Saudi women see themselves as an integral part of the Saudi tapestry, and they believe English is important to all Saudis regardless of gender. The discussion of English in Saudi Arabia and Saudi women revealed three distinct discourses of guilt, defiance, and Islam and English.

**Question 2. What are the discourses of investment in learning English as a foreign language by the Saudi women?**

The data revealed a wide array of these discourses in the form of: (a) push and pull factors for learning English, and (b) push and pull factors for choosing Saudi Arabia for learning English. In the first strand, seven push and pull factors were identified:

- (i) **Self-development factors** – either for employment, studying, or helping children. The most notable aspect of this category is the use of the Islamic discourse to rationalize investing in learning English.
- (ii) **Economic factors** – the classical economic capital explained by Bourdieu (1992) and emanating from linguistic capital.
- (iii) **Knowledge factors** – using English either to fill knowledge gaps through reading literature in English, transfer knowledge to other parties through English, or pursue knowledge for the sake of obtaining a higher degree. The notion of a ‘knowledge monopoly’ through English was mentioned as one of the obstacles and rationales for learning English.
- (iv) **Language abundance factors** – introducing English in public and at higher education levels, EMI, and the fact that English is the only foreign language taught at a large scale in the kingdom.
- (v) **Higher rates of responsiveness and fears of rejection** – in various guises such as getting better service, keeping face with other English-speaking Saudis, and exercising a freedom of expression [especially online].
- (vi) **Child rearing factors** – summarized as learning English to help their children in their academic and social development in the short- and long-

term. Nevertheless, this discourse was rendered more *idealistic* than *realistic*.

- (vii) **Familiarity with language factors** – represented by the greater exposure to various media that use English.

The other part of this section dealt with the push and pull factors; for instance, factors that explain the pursuit of English in Saudi Arabia rather than abroad. In this regards, the participants focused on (a) cost factors and (b) Islamic factors.

### **Question 3. How are the identities of Saudi women learners affected by their decision to learn English?**

The questionnaire data indicated that the participating Saudi women saw that learning English had a positive impact on their identities, with the most positive impact being in their personal traits. One of the most dominant themes in this area was that learning English gave the Saudi women a podium from which to fight against the prescribed views and roles attached to Saudi women. The participants seemed to understand their subjectivities, and thus, could strategically present the needed subjectivity according to the social structures in which they found themselves. The data showed that the Saudi women assumed various identity positions and that learning English sometimes helped them to navigate through these positions. In addition, a close relationship was found between religion, social and cultural structures, and the women's sense of identity, and that relationship paved the way for a discussion about *identity maintenance* while learning a foreign language.

### **Question 4. What opportunities are available for the women to exercise agency as they learn English in Saudi Arabia?**

The discussion about available opportunities of agency for Saudi women while they learn English was especially interesting because of the data it revealed. Importantly, the Saudi women's agency was not one of resistance, but rather, of the pious. For instance, Saudi women chose to exercise their agency by conforming to the religious norms and traditions in Saudi Arabia, while also striving to change these structures for the sake of more freedoms. This view of Muslim women's agency eschews the Western essentialist view that paints all Muslim women with the same brush – docile, suppressed, and fighting for their freedom.

Several opportunities of agency were described in this study, such as the agency of investment: the type of language courses and English language skills that are desired or not desired. The data revealed the existence of an ongoing struggle in Saudi society, especially among religious clerks, senior citizens, and men who feel that women's agency and subjectivity is an extension of their own agency and subjectivity.

### **7.2.1 Emerging themes.**

Finally, the data analysis resulted in three emerging themes. The first was the issue of developing double identities. Two participants reported that they had created two identities: one associated with the Arabic language world, and the other associated with an English language world. Although both participants named Islam as the baseline for their identity, they felt that they had double identities, with the only difference between the two being in the norms of behavior and expression.

The other emerging theme dealt with some of the obstacles that stand before women in their quest to acquire English. One such obstacle was a ghost of the idea that their linguistic return on investment could be higher if they invested in English in an English-speaking country. Some participants voiced concerns about (a) the heavy influence of L1 (Arabic) by their colleagues in the classroom, (b) the un-Islamic curricula and materials, and (c) the personality of learners that push them away from full participation in the classroom.

The third emerging theme was about the discourses of Islam and Quran. Although this theme is not closely related to the teaching and learning of English language, it provides an insight into the intersectionality of Islam as a religion with all actions. This theme shows religious interpretations are used by various stakeholders to either facilitate or hinder access to various types of capital; in this case English language.

## **7.3 Implications for the Participants**

In any language learning setting, it is important to understand the "set of beliefs about language that speakers refer to in order to rationalize or justify the way in which they perceive language, its value and its usage" (Moore & Py, 2011,



p. 226), and to make sense of Schiffman's (1996) "linguistic culture," which entails "the set of behaviours, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language" (p. 5). In this study, the participants expressed contentment about their language experience in Saudi Arabia; however, they also expressed a preference for studying English in an English-speaking country to gain language authenticity that would allow them to assert themselves as authorized speakers (i.e., achieving native-like language proficiency) (Bourdieu, 1977). The 'native-speakerism' ideology, which upholds that native speakers of English are the best language teachers (Holliday, 2005), was believed by some of the participants to lead to the othering of other English language teachers based on nationality. In turn, this could result in a cultural disbelief of their ability to teach English and would jeopardize the learners' investment. In light of these themes, English needed to be understood as being taught instrumentally worldwide, and arguably, it has lost its function as a "language for identification." Instead, it has been categorized as a "language for communication" (House, 2003). House (2003) further argued that English is "a mere tool bereft of collective cultural capital" (p. 560). Therefore, language learners in Saudi Arabia should recognize that:

English is removed from the conventional, standardized use of native English speakers and transformed into a new, localized English that incorporates the cultural and language elements of non-native English users. English ownership is thus appropriated by another group of English speakers who use the language in their own culture (Yeh, 2013, p. 330).

In Chapter 5, I discussed the various discourses of investing in English and shed some light on how some of the participants have taken matters into their own hands to ensure the continuous practice of the language. These findings highlight the need to establish routes of proficiency that meet the myriad needs of learners and how society might benefit from the linguistic gains. Before embarking on the quest to acquire language, learners must first identify the level of proficiency they require since this can serve as a rubric for addressing their linguistic investment needs. In addition, they need to establish routes of proficiency, such as access to

language communities that actively use the language or language websites that offer live platforms for language use.

In addition, language learners may benefit from a greater understanding of the English language sociolinguistics in such matters as: What are the varieties of English they are going to learn? What English literacy skills do they possess and which ones will they learn? In which domains will they use their language skills? I believe that having an understanding of these issues before and during embarking on the quest to acquire English will prevent feelings of frustration, minimize attrition, and maximize investment.

#### **7.4 Implications for Research**

This study demonstrated the need to hear the Saudi women's voices to address the paucity of research targeting Saudi women in Saudi Arabia, and to address the misinterpretations surrounding Saudi women and learning English in Saudi Arabia. In her essay, "The politics of 'unveiling Saudi women'," Le Renard (2014) spoke of the state's deliberate actions to promote unveiled, successful Saudi women in media outlets intended for the West, and explained that such actions ignore the existence of women with other social and political orientations, leading to an uneven representation of Saudi women. Like Le Renard (2014), I argue that SLA studies targeting Saudi women have focused primarily on Saudi women learning English at universities either inside or outside Saudi Arabia. This neglects other Saudi women who might not be university-educated, but are still highly interested and have invested in learning English. One of the conclusions of this study was the need to eschew the unified image of Saudi women, but in the literature, many studies tend to focus on educated Saudi women at local or overseas universities. Such studies seem to be engaged in contradictory practices; on one hand, they are unveiling Saudi women to the world, especially to the West that has long portrayed Saudi women as complicit and restrained. They are revealed to be exceptional Saudi women who have ventured into language learning and conquered it, and now prevail with new, modern, and globalized identities. On the other hand, the studies ignore the existence of other Saudi women with different education and social levels who have also ventured into the same field. I believe that the primary implication of this study is the need to unveil

the “research invisibility” of regular Saudi women, the mothers and wives who did not attend university, or who are in remote rural areas of the kingdom, but are also interested in learning English.

Several studies that target Saudi women use a familiar emancipatory tone, which sees the state-mandated sex-segregation as an evil that needs to be eradicated so that Saudi women can have more room to be free. In contrast, one of the implications of this study is the suggestion to reinforce the widespread distribution of female-only language schools in Saudi Arabia since emotions can significantly affect foreign language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Lopez & Aguilar, 2013; Pishghadam, Zabetipour, & Aminzadeh, 2016). In his study on the difficulties faced by Saudi women when studying abroad, Alqefari (2015) indicated that the level of anxiety among Saudi women is less when they study in same-sex classrooms. Furthermore, in response to a questionnaire item (How important is an exclusive female class), 50% of the Saudi women respondents answered “high,” 17% responded “very high,” and 33% answered “medium.”

Given the rapid changes taking place in Saudi society, with a shift in the status of Saudi women, and based on the opinions of the Saudi women in this study, the Saudi society must not be dichotomized when investigating English and singling out women. Saudi women, like Saudi men, are integral to the Saudi tapestry and are affected by the same circumstances and events. The literature on Saudi women is dominated by two categories: “exceptional women” and “suppressed women”. What is needed, at least in SLA research, is to consider Saudi women as citizens away from the burden of being the repositories of religion and national identity, and more like citizens being influenced by learning a foreign language.

In addition, an important implication of this study is concerned with the research on identity. Norton (2000) and other SLA researchers have solidified the concept of identity as being fluid and difficult to define or classify. This study corroborates that identity is a difficult concept to work with and it is engulfed with a number of difficulties. The first is the fact that studying identity is context-sensitive; for instance, different contexts will yield different conceptualizations of identity; and therefore, the results cannot be generalized. The findings from a number of research studies have established a limited relationship between linguistic

competency in English and identity. The findings of this research suggest a possibly weaker relationship than what has been indicated in the literature. As a possible explanation, the participants in this study were not immigrants, like those in other studies. Thus, the power relations that Norton (2000) and others suggest to be primary factors in shaping women's identities, with regards to acquiring English, are less relevant in the case of Saudi women who are learning English away from their host community. In any case, the findings reported here are correlated with those of other authors, in the sense that learning a foreign language is a site of struggle that leads to the renegotiation of identity.

The other implication for research is concerned with the notion of intersectionality. Throughout this study, the women narrated stories about how power relations were reflected in their social lives, influencing their decisions to learn English and having an impact on their identities. One of the conclusions is about the importance of understanding the learners from the perspectives of their communities. Since people have multi-dimensional and complex lives, the inequalities are never due to single, distinct factor. Instead, the outcomes are from intersections at different social locations, power relations, and experience (Hankivsky, 2014). Researchers need to include the theory of intersectionality in interpreting their results. According to Morris and Bunjun (2007), "It is important to acknowledge multiple realities, and not to 'essentialize' any group, that is, not to treat any group as if all its members are exactly the same and have the same experiences, view and priorities" (p. 5). I call upon researchers interested in investigating Saudi women to consider the myriad linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and racial differences that exist among the women, and not to presume that a single EFL Saudi woman learner might be speaking for all Saudi women.

### **7.5 Implications for Language Institutes in Saudi Arabia**

Three points need to be clarified with regards to the Saudi EFL market; specifically: 1) the dwindling oil prices, 2) the decreased availability of scholarships to study abroad, and 3) the saturated market with providers who extend general English and examination preparation courses.

A quick survey of 11 prominent local English language providers in Saudi Arabia<sup>22</sup> revealed that most course offerings are in either general English, test preparation (IELTS and TOEFL), or ESP (banking sector, medical sector, and secretarial and administrative sector). Nevertheless, a void in scholarships that support opportunities to acquire English for academic purposes (EAP) and some room is available to be filled by language institutes wishing to establish programs targeting those interested in studying abroad or wishing to augment their academic English before entering a Saudi university. In addition, since the primary motivation for most Saudis to pursue English is to improve their employment prospects, the language institutes should add more specialized ESP courses that cater to sectors in the Kingdom like oil and gas, communication, and engineering.

Based on the interviews with the participating Saudi women, stereotyping seems to have been used by the Western women teachers. Mohd-Asraf (2005) argued that teaching a foreign language involves more than

teaching approaches and pedagogy. It requires, among other things, that teachers be aware of the students' value and belief systems, as these aspects shape their attitudes towards the language (p. 116).

Therefore, an implication of this study is the need to culturally train English teachers who work with locals, especially if they are Saudi women.

Given the large number of language institutes that offer English language courses at either a personal or corporate level to both sexes in Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to determine whether or not the number of offered language courses for Saudi women is equal in number and quality to those being offered to Saudi men, across the private language institutes. This issue needs to be addressed not only by the researchers and language institutes, but by the Ministry of Education that oversees the institutes.

Finally, language institutes in Saudi Arabia should provide better support to their learners, especially women students, by facilitating socialization opportunities

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<sup>22</sup> The providers are: 1) the British Council, 2) Direct English – Al Khaleej, 3) the Berlitz Language Center, 4) the Saudi Academy, 5) the Wall Street Institute, 6) International House, 7) the Cambridge English Academy, 8) the ELS Academy, 9) the London School of English, 10) the Expressions Training Center, 11) the Saudi British Center, and 12) the Canadian Language Center.

for them to practice the language they are acquiring. In the case of ESP, learners should be linked to local businesses so that the learners can have opportunities to put their language to practical use.

## **7.6 Implications for Foreign Language Policy Makers**

Contrary to the assumption that the spread of English is often the result of linguistic imperialism, learning English in Saudi Arabia is important for pragmatic, social, and economic reasons. Being able to communicate in more than one language is considered to be highly prestigious in Saudi Arabia. While no accurate figure exists as to the number of Saudi citizens who are bilingual or proficient in English, the government foreign language policy mandates that students at schools should learn a foreign language (English). If we shift our attention away from Saudi women to address the issue of how education plays an integral role in shaping the identity of learners, the data shows how some Saudi children are raised to favor English over Arabic language, because of the economic capital, social status, and prestige that Saudi parents believe they and their children can attain by communicating in English. In Saudi Arabia, parents and educational institutions, among other entities, knowingly or unknowingly, are promoting such trends. Although Saudi education policy-makers emphasize Arabic, the educators, market forces, and institutes of higher education emphasize other features.

Despite the momentum of learning English in Saudi Arabia, and despite the importance being placed on English literacy by the government, the population, and institutes of higher education, many studies (e.g., Al-Seghayer, 2005; Alrabi, 2010) have shown that Saudi Arabia has the lowest level of English proficiency in the world. If we examine the EF English Language Proficiency Index report (2015), Saudi Arabia ranked 68 out of 70, just above Algeria and Cambodia, who were economically lower than Saudi Arabia. The situation becomes even worse if we consider the statistical data for the two major international language tests; namely, IELTS and TOEFL. In the IELTS (2015), Saudi Arabia ranked 39 out of 40 countries (in both general and academic IELTS); and in TOEFL (2015), Saudi Arabia ranked 68 out of 70. Al Khateeb (2015) argued that “since the introduction of English to the Saudi educational system, there has been little evidence that students’ achievement has progressed satisfactorily” (p. 3). Consequently, “once

out of school or college, students tap resources such as language institutes to manage their proficiency issues” (Al-Nasser, 2015, p. 1617).

Such observations justify the need to critically scrutinize the alignment of almost six years of English learning, one full year of English at the preparatory programs at Saudi universities; and adopting EMI by Saudi higher education to: (a) establish target competencies for language teaching in public schools that intersect with the country’s priorities and future needs of Saudi English learners, (b) maintain Arabic language beyond its ceremonial and religious role in Saudi Arabia, and (c) prevent it from becoming a second-class language for Saudis, and prevent “the development of speakers who are not multilingual, but rather, semilingual (i.e., those who have no real proficiency in any of the languages)” (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999, p. 13).

## **7.7 Suggestions for Further Research**

Research on foreign language acquisition and its impact on the learners’ identity and sense of agency should be extended to cover more contexts, more identities, and different groups in EFL contexts. The research could also be expanded by conducting similar studies in other GCC countries to create a wealth of data for future comparative studies. In general, the aim should be to understand the experiences of other GCC women who are learning English in their respective countries for the sake of a comparative analysis. In terms of intersectionality, future studies should target a wide array of variables with regard to the subjects’ backgrounds, ages, professions, lengths of study, and religious affiliations that could give new insights into the relationship between language learning, identity, and sense of agency. As a follow-up to this research, it would be fruitful to focus on private language institutes in Saudi Arabia and investigate their role as EFL providers in regards to Saudi women’s identity, and to investigate their methods and beliefs about the practices in classrooms and see how they are being influenced by the general trend of widespread English usage in Saudi Arabia. Such a study would be expected to not only produce comprehensive statistics but also show the extent of the general spread of English in Saudi Arabia and among Saudi women in particular. Future studies could statistically map the spread of English in Saudi Arabia in both formal and informal settings. In terms of the methodologies,

future research could adopt mixed methods and use larger sample sizes. Quantifiable data could also be instrumental in exploring the variables that affect the relationships between language learning, identity, and sense of agency.

### **7.8 Limitations of Study**

The first limitation of the study is concerned with the study population. The small sample size (12 Saudi women), even though allowing for an in-depth analysis, meant that the findings are relevant in terms of explaining the phenomenon, but insufficient for making any extensive inferential statistical tests that might reveal more about the relational nature between acquiring English, Saudi women's identity, and their sense of agency. In previous chapters, I advocated for acknowledging the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity, and social status, among other factors. In this study, one of the limitations is that it did not include participants from a wide range of backgrounds, because of the difficulty in accessing Saudi women. In my opinion, the biggest limitation is that the sample did not represent a sufficient number of members of visible minorities in Saudi Arabia (e.g., Shiite, naturalized Saudis, and Saudis of other origins).

Given the conservative nature of the Saudi society, and the difficulty in accessing all women's language classrooms, one of the study limitations was the absence of any classroom observation. This prevented the examination of the dynamics in the classroom between EFL teachers and the EFL participants, on one hand, and the dynamics of the relationships among the EFL students, on the other. In addition, because of the lack of classroom observation, it was difficult for me to get to know the participants and develop some rapport with them before beginning the semi-structured interview phase. The other limitation was related to the absence of interview video-taping. This led to a challenge during the transcription phase of data analysis to comprehensively record the non-verbal components of the conversations. Kvale (2007) commented that "Transcripts are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes. Transcripts are decontextualized conversations, abstractions from the original landscape from which they are derived" (p. 98).



Other limitations in this study involved: 1) a lack of literature dealing in depth with the research topic, 2) the need to use cultural sensitivity where some interviews could not be conducted face-to-face, and 3) since some participants were from distant parts of the Kingdom, it was hard for me (financially and physically) to make the trip.

## **7.9 My Doctoral Journey**

I may not be alone in describing my doctoral research as a distinctive and informative emotional roller-coaster. As a novice researcher, the whole process of conducting this research was a learning experience that affected me both as an academic and as a person. In this section, I will briefly reflect on my experience designing and conducting this study.

First and foremost, my transition from being a teacher or layperson to a novice researcher or graduate student has been a daunting process requiring a deep shift with the emancipating of myself from a previously-held set of beliefs to embracing a new identity (i.e., an education researcher). As a novice researcher and graduate student, I have two hats to wear: the first is as an education research producer for quality scholarly work that is related to my chosen field of study; the second is of a education researcher consumer, to read, critique, and discern good quality from inferior quality research. To fulfill the requirements of both tasks, novice researchers must familiarize themselves with several constructs, notions, terminologies, and philosophical perspectives that underpin a research paradigm. To do so, they need to immerse themselves in an endless list of readings that contain that knowledge. My quest for knowledge has enabled me, now more than ever, to see how my thinking process, and my participants' ideas influence the choices we make. My knowledge has been continuously challenged by the many suggestions, questions, and remarks made by my supervisor that have helped to reveal my biases and the flaws in my study design.

The data collection phase, especially the interview part, was a great learning experience. The pilot study for the interviews also went very well and helped me rewrite the questions to get as much information as possible during the actual interviews. During the first interview; however, I was concerned that I was not getting enough data, and tried to push the participant to speak more without giving

her enough time to think. At the same time, I was too busy taking notes and missed the opportunity to ask follow-up questions on important issues that she raised. When stepping back and evaluating the interviewing, I could recognize the flaws in my practice. I was then adamant about not repeating the same mistakes in subsequent interviews, and I can confidently say that my interviewing skills improved as a result.

I value the experiences I gained from this research as a novice researcher. Above all, I value my burgeoning skills in critical thinking. In using critical thinking, I enthusiastically echo Almunajjed's (2006) belief that "the persistence of misunderstandings and misconceptions about the status of Arab Muslim women in general and Saudi women in particular has distorted their true social image in most Western countries" (p.1).

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## Appendix 1: Certificate of Ethical Approval



### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus  
Heavitree Road  
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

**Title of Project:** The impact of English as a Foreign Language on the identity and agency of Saudi women

**Researcher(s) name:** Rami Mustafa

**Supervisor(s):** Dr Salah Troudi; Mr Charles Hadfield

**This project has been approved for the period**

From: 07/03/2016

To: 01/12/2017

**Ethics Committee approval reference:** D/15/16/34

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Durrant', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Signature:** (Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee)

**Date:** 07/03/2016



## Appendix 2: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Research



### INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

#### Title of Research Project

**The Impact of English as a Foreign Language on the identity and agency of Saudi women**

#### Details of Project

*This project is intended to understand the relationship between learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and identity and agency of Saudi women. The aim is to see if learning English impacts the identity and agency of the women; and how Saudi women perceive the role of English language in negotiating their sense of identity and roles in the Saudi community.*

#### Contact Details

For further information about the research /interview data, please contact:

Name: Rami Fawwa Mustafa  
Telephone: +966-50-668-5720  
Email: [rfm207@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:rfm207@exeter.ac.uk)

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Graduate School of Education: [ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk)

#### Confidentiality

*Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.*

#### Data Protection Notice

*The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form."*

*The research is not funded by any local (Saudi) or international agencies; therefore, the information will be reported as impartially and neutrally as possible. The electronic data will be stored in a password protected file inside a password protected laptop that belongs to the researcher. No unauthorized third parties will have access to these files. Paper data sources will be stored securely in a locker in the researcher's home office; and no access will be granted to any unauthorized third parties.*

#### Anonymity

*Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name. All identifiable parts that might lead to the exposure of your identity will also be anonymized. However, a mention of your group and/or region will be used in the research.*

#### Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.



## INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymized form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Email address of participant if they have  
requested to view a copy of the interview  
transcript.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).  
Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

### Appendix 3: Participant Profiles

Name	Age	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Place of origin
Faten	42	Married	M.Ed Education	Univ. lecturer Writer and novelist	Jeddah
Muntaha	36	Married	MBA	Bank employee	Dhahran
Zamzam	29	Single	2-year Diploma	Admin Assistant	Khobar
Eiman	25	Engaged	BA Math	Math Teacher	Khobar
Noura	38	Married	High School	Housewife	Riyadh
Nouf	50	Married	BA Social Studies	Retired Teacher	Riyadh
Faiza	40	Married	BA Islamic Studies	Islamic Studies Teacher	Mecca
Abrar	34	Married	High School	Housewife	Madinah
Salwa	21	Single	Psychology Student	-	Jeddah
Zayna	20	Single	Nursing Student	-	Riyadh
Rawabi	29	Married	School	Housewife	Dammam
Afaf	40	Married	College	Entrepreneur	Dhahran

## Appendix 4: The Questionnaire



### Questionnaire Participation

**Project title: The impact of English as a Foreign Language on the identity and agency of Saudi women**

Dear Participant,

My name is **Rami F. Mustafa** and I am conducting this research as a doctoral student in the **EDD TESOL** programme at **University of Exeter, Exeter, UK**. This questionnaire is part of an ongoing research that strives to understand the relationship between learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and identity and agency of Saudi women.

I would appreciate it if you take the time to answer these brief questions. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please note that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers; answer the questions as truly as you feel. All your answers will be anonymous and treated with confidentiality.

The study has been approved by the Chair of Ethics Committee, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter.

Rami F. Mustafa

Email: [rfm207@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:rfm207@exeter.ac.uk)

Tel: +966-506-685-720

المكرمة المشاركة في الدراسة،

اسمي رامي فواز مصطفى، طالب في مرحلة الدكتوراة في برنامج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للناطقين بغيرها في كلية التربية في جامعة أكستر، المملكة المتحدة (بريطانيا). الاستبيان الحالي جزء مكمل لرسالة الدكتوراة و يهدف إلى كشف العلاقة بين تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المملكة العربية السعودية من قبل النساء السعوديات، و تأثيره على هوية و استقلالية المتعلمات للغة.

سأكون في غاية الامتنان و التقدير ان قمتم بالمشاركة في الاستبيان و الإجابة عن الأسئلة المطروحة بكل مصداقية. سيستغرق الاستبيان حوالي 15 دقيقة فقط. لا يوجد هناك ما يسمى إجابة "صحيحة" و أخرى "خاطئة". ستبقى إجابات الاستبيان مجهولة المصدر، وسيتم التعامل معها بكل سرية.

لقد تم إعتتماد الدراسة من قبل لجنة آداب البحث العلمي في كلية التربية في جامعة أكستر.

## The impact of English as a foreign language on the identity and agency of Saudi women

### Section A: Please complete the

القسم أ: يرجى منك تعبئة قسم البيانات الشخصية

#### Biographical data:

Place of origin:

مسقط رأسك:

City of residence:

مدينة السكن:

Marital status: Single Married Other

الوضع العائلي: عزباء متزوجة غير ذلك

Are you employed? Yes No

هل أنت موظفة؟ نعم لا

Education Level:

المستوى التعليمي:

### Section B: English Language Background

القسم ب: معلومات عن تعلم اللغة

الإنجليزية

How long have you been learning English:

كم لك من الوقت تتعلمين اللغة الإنجليزية:

Did you study English abroad (USA, UK, Canada,

هل درست الإنجليزية في الخارج (أمريكا، كندا،

Australia): Yes No

بريطانيا، استراليا): نعم لا

Where are you studying English now?

أين تدرسين اللغة الآن؟

What is your current level in English now:

ما هو مستواك في اللغة الإنجليزية الآن:

Beginner Intermediate Upper Intermediate

مبتدئ متوسط متوسط عالي

Advanced

متقدم

Do you speak other foreign languages? Yes

هل تتحدثين أية لغات أخرى؟ نعم لا

No

ما هي اللغة؟

What language?

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box

الرجاء وضع علامة صح (✓) في الصندوق

المناسب

I speak English to:

أنا أتحدث الإنجليزية مع:

All the

Sometimes

Never

time

أحياناً

اطلاقاً

كل الوقت

Parents

الوالدين

Siblings

الأخوة و الأخوات

Relatives

الأقارب

Friends outside  
school

الأصدقاء خارج المدرسة

Friends in school

الأصدقاء داخل المدرسة

My children

أبنائي

Maid

الخدمة

Others: Specify

آخرين (الرجاء التحديد)

س. 2 أنا أتحدث اللغة العربية مع: Q. 2 I speak Arabic to:				
	All the time كل الوقت	Sometimes أحياناً	Never إطلاقاً	
Parents				الوالدين
Siblings				الأخوة و الأخوات
Relatives				الأقارب
Friends outside school				الأصدقاء خارج المدرسة
Friends in school				الأصدقاء داخل المدرسة
My children				أبنائي
Maid				الخدمة
Others: Specify				آخرين (الرجاء التحديد)



**Q. 3 The reason(s) I am learning****English is/are:****Please tick (✓) the appropriate box**

☐ My current employment requires that

☐ To enhance my employment status

☐ To enhance employment opportunities

☐ To study in an English Speaking country

☐ To communicate with English Speaking relatives

☐ To meet and communicate with English Speaking people

☐ I like to read in English

☐ For travel reasons

☐ To help my children at school

☐ Leisure activity

☐ Other reasons

س. 3 الأسباب التي من أجلها أتعلم الإنجليزية هي:

الرجاء وضع علامة صح (✓) في الصندوق المناسب

☐ عملي الحالي يتطلب مني تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

☐ لتحسين وضعي الوظيفي الحالي

☐ لتحسين فرص إيجاد عمل

☐ للدراسة في الخارج

☐ للتواصل مع أقارب لي يتكلمون الإنجليزية

☐ لمقابلة أشخاص ناطقين بالإنجليزية و التواصل معهم

☐ لأنني أحب القراءة باللغة الإنجليزية

☐ لأغراض السياحة و السفر

☐ لمساعدة أولادي في دراستهم

☐ لأغراض الترفيه

☐ أسباب أخرى

**Q.4 The reason(s) you chose****English, not other language is****Please tick (✓) the appropriate box**

☐ English is the most important foreign language in KSA

☐ All business is done via English language in KSA

☐ There are no other foreign language available to learn

☐ English is easy to learn

س. 4 الأسباب التي من أجلها اخترت اللغة الإنجليزية عن

غيرها من اللغات

الرجاء وضع علامة صح (✓) في الصندوق المناسب

☐ اللغة الإنجليزية هي اللغة الأجنبية الأهم في السعودية

☐ جميع الأعمال في السعودية تتم بواسطة اللغة الإنجليزية

☐ لا يوجد لغات أجنبية أخرى متاحة

☐ اللغة الإنجليزية سهلة التعلم

- [ ] I can practice English more than other languages in KSA [ ] أستطيع ممارسة اللغة في السعودية أكثر من اللغات الأخرى
- [ ] The number of speakers of other languages is miniscule [ ] عدد المتحدثين بلغات غير الإنجليزية هزيل جدا في السعودية
- [ ] My kids study in English, so I learn English [ ] أبنائي يدرسون باللغة الإنجليزية، فتعلمت الإنجليزية
- [ ] English teaching centers are ubiquitous in KSA [ ] مراكز تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية واسعة الانتشار في المملكة
- [ ] Other reasons [ ] أسباب أخرى

### Section C: Your views regarding English Language status in Saudi Arabia

القسم ج: آرائك حول وضع اللغة الإنجليزية في السعودية

Please indicate how far you agree with each of the statements below by shading/circling the appropriate circle below each questions: 1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= neutral, 4= disagree, 5= strongly disagree

الرجاء توضيح مدى تأييدك أو رفضك للعبارات التالية إما بتظليل رقم الإجابة أو وضع دائرة حول الرقم: 1= موافقة بشدة، 2= موافقة، 3= غير متأكدة، 4= معارضة، 5= معارضة بشدة

1. I believe that English language is important to all Saudis

أنا أؤمن بأن اللغة الإنجليزية لغة مهمة لجميع السعوديين

— (1) — (2) — (3) — (4) — (5) —

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

موافقة بشدة موافقة غير متأكدة معارضة معارضة بشدة

2. I believe that learning English is especially important to Saudi women

أنا أؤمن بأن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية مهم بشكل خاص للنساء السعوديات

— (1) — (2) — (3) — (4) — (5) —

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

موافقة بشدة موافقة غير متأكدة معارضة معارضة بشدة

3. I believe that the increased importance of English language in Saudi Arabia is exaggerated

أنا أؤمن بأن الأهمية المتزايدة للغة الإنجليزية في السعودية هو أمر مبالغ به



4. I believe that learning English is important to find employment in Saudi Arabia

أنا أؤمن بأن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية مهم جداً لإيجاد فرص عمل في السعودية



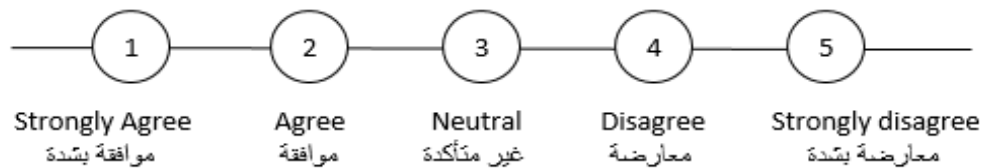
5. I believe that, in Saudi Arabia, speaking English is prestigious

أنا أؤمن أنه، في السعودية، تحدث اللغة الإنجليزية يعتبر نوع من المكانة الاجتماعية الراقية



6. I believe that the widespread of English language in Saudi Arabia has negatively affected the Saudi culture and society

أنا أؤمن بأن الانتشار الواسع للغة الإنجليزية في السعودية قد أثر سلباً في الثقافة و المجتمع السعوديين.



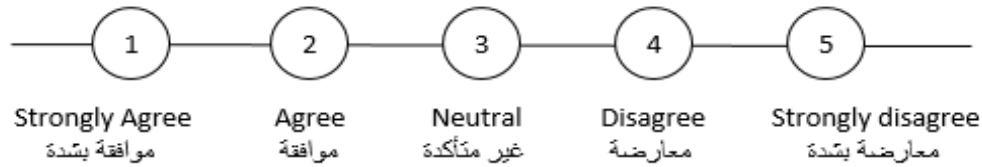
7. As a Saudi woman, I believe that speaking English can give me wider freedom.

كإمرأة سعودية، أنا أؤمن بأن تحدث اللغة الإنجليزية قد منحني حريات أكثر



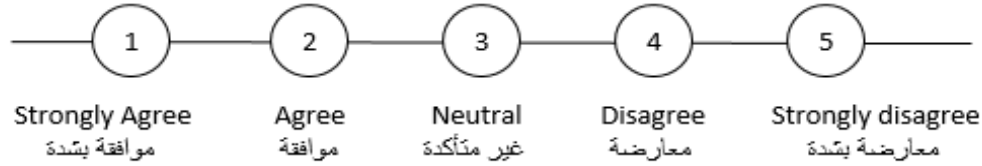
8. As a Saudi woman, I believe that learning English does not contradict with my status

كإمرأة سعودية، أنا أؤمن بأن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لا يتعارض مع وضعي كإمرأة.



9. As a Saudi woman, I believe that my image will not be affected because of learning English.

كإمرأة سعودية، أنا أؤمن بأن صورتي المجتمعية لن تتغير بسبب تعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية



10. I believe that learning English does not contradict with Islamic teachings

أنا أؤمن بأن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لا يتعارض مع تعاليم الإسلام



11. I believe that focusing on English language will negatively impact Arabic language among Saudis

أنا أؤمن بأن التركيز على مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية سيضعف العربية بين السعوديين



## Section D: Your views regarding the relationship between Learning English, Identity, and Agency for Saudi women

القسم ج: آرائك حول العلاقة بين تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، و الهوية، و الاستقلالية بالنسبة للمرأة السعودية

12. Learning English had a positive impact on my identity as a Saudi Muslim woman

لقد أثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ايجابياً بهويتي كإمرأة سعودية مسلمة



13. Learning English had a negative impact on my identity as a Saudi Muslim woman  
لقد أثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية سلباً بهويتي كامرأة سعودية مسلمة



14. Learning English did not have any impact on my identity as a Saudi Muslim woman  
لم يؤثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بهويتي كامرأة سعودية مسلمة



15. Learning English has influenced the way I understand the world around me  
لقد أثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في طريقة فهمي للعالم من حولي



16. Learning English has affected the way I relate to the opposite sex in society/work place  
لقد أثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بالطريقة التي أتعامل بها مع الرجال السعوديين في المجتمع/مكان العمل



17. Learning English gave me more confidence to express my thoughts and ideas  
لقد أعطاني تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ثقة أكبر بالتعبير عن آرائي و مشاعري



18. I find that I express myself better in English  
 أنا أعبر عن نفسي بشكل أفضل باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية



19. I feel that people listen to me more, and take me seriously when I communicate in English  
 أشعر بأن الناس يستمعون إلي و بجدية أكبر عندما أتحدث اللغة الإنجليزية.



20. I find that I can discuss certain topics using English that I could not with Arabic language  
 بإمكانني مناقشة بعض المواضيع الحساسة بواسطة اللغة الإنجليزية، لم يكن بمقدوري مناقشتها باللغة العربية.



21. English has given me deeper understanding of Saudi women issues  
 لقد منحتني اللغة الإنجليزية فهماً أعمق لقضايا المرأة السعودية



22. English has affected my religious beliefs positively  
 لقد أثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بمعتقداتي الدينية بشكل إيجابي



23. English has affected my religious beliefs negatively  
لقد اثر تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بمعتقداتي الدينية بشكل سلبي



24. I feel that I am more independent with English than before  
أشعر بانني مستقلة أكثر الآن بسبب تعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية



25. I feel that English made me less dependent on my "Mahram"  
أشعر بالإستقلالية عن "المحرم" أكثر بسبب تعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية



26. I feel that learning English gave me stronger decision making skills  
أشعر بانني أملك مهارات أكبر في اتخاذ القرار أكثر من ذي قبل



27. English language has given me the power to create change around me  
لقد مكنتني تعلم اللغة الغنجليزية من إحداث التغيير من حولي



28. Learning English has given me knowledge, and consequently, more choices than before

لقد منحني تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية قدرا أكبر من المعرفة، و بالتالي خيارات أكثر



29. English is the language of modernity and elite, and that is how I feel

اللغة الإنجليزية هي لغة التقدم و الرقي، و كذلك أشعر



30. English has given me a sense of superiority over the Saudi women who do not speak the language.

لقد منحني اللغة الإنجليزية حساً بالأفضلية عن النساء السعوديات اللاتي لا يتحدثن الإنجليزية



31. I feel that I can relate more to bilingual Saudi women than monolingual (Arabic speaking) Saudi women

أشعر بانني اقرب للنساء السعوديات ثنائيات اللغة من النساء السعوديات الناطقات بالعربية فقط





## Appendix 5: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What are your views regarding the status of English language in Saudi Arabia?

- Do you think that English is especially important to Saudi Women? Why/Why not?
- Who do you think benefits from English language more in the Saudi society, men or women? Why?
- Does English have any effect on Arabic language?

2. Why are you learning English?

- What are the gains you hope to attain from learning English?

3. Why did you choose to learn English in specific? And why learning English in Saudi Arabia not abroad?

4. Do you think you have changed from your experience in learning English?

- How have you changed before learning English?
- Which aspects of your identity have changed the most?
- Do you consider these changes to be positive or negative?

5. Do you think by learning English you have acquired new beliefs, ideas, meanings? What are they? And how do they affect your identity?

6. Do you feel that there is a conflict between your English language world and your Arabic language world? How so?

7. Which language, in your opinion, will play the greatest role in your future? Why?

8. Is there a relationship between learning English and freedom? How so? How does it apply to you?

9. Which factors did you take into consideration when you decided to learn English in Saudi Arabia? And did you receive more support or resistance throughout your journey?

10. Are the cultural beliefs about gender, women's roles and duties in Saudi Arabia different from the religious beliefs?

- Did these beliefs support or hinder your experience in learning English?

11. How did learning English affect your relationship with your family/friends/colleagues/ society around you?

12. What does English represent to you?

13. How do you describe yourself?

- What makes Saudi women different from other women in the GCC/The region/the world?

## Appendix 6: Interview Sample

**Researcher:** First of all, thank you for taking part in this study. Let me start by assuring you that no personal data will be revealed; and your actual name has been replaced by your chosen alias (Muntaha). Let me also inform you that you are free to walk away at any time, and if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, please let me know. Moreover, please note that this interview is recorded; and no one else will have access to these recordings but me. Before we begin, do you have any concerns or requests?

**Muntaha:** Thank you, I am ready.

**Researcher:** Great, let me begin by asking you about the status of English in Saudi Arabia? Do you think it's exaggerated?

**Muntaha:** English is a global language nowadays, and it is needed to communicate with the world. As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, I believe English is very important to us. I believe you are aware of the Kingdom's 2030 initiative? With this initiative English is not only a luxury, it is a must. The initiative will open the Kingdom's doors to foreign companies; and the locals need to be ready for that by at least good command of English. So, if it was exaggerated once, which I do not think it was, it is a must now.

**Researcher:** very well. Do you think that English is especially important to Saudi women?

**Muntaha:** Saudi women are Saudi citizens, and in my opinion they are not of less impotence than Saudi men; so my answer is English is important to all Saudis, male or female. I don't think we should treat any sex any different when it comes to education. However, women should strive to learn more English because as mothers and probably the number 1 consumer of services in Saudi Arabia, English is very helpful to them.

**Researcher:** Ok let me ask you this question in another way. Who do you think benefits from English more: men or women?

**Muntaha:** [chuckles] Of course men and the proof is that in the bank where I work, more men than women are sent to attend these executive language courses, which are a series of advanced English courses to prepare employees to become managers and supervisors. Now, the fact that more men are sent is an evidence that the society has more trust in men; and men consequently benefit more. Unfair!

**Researcher:** Let's talk about why are you learning English? What are your reasons? And what do you hope to gain from learning English?

**Muntaha:** I started this as a way for me to upgrade my credentials to meet the criteria set for a higher position in the bank. I believe that I'm deprived this promotion because of my English proficiency level, and the bank management is not doing anything to fix that; so I decided to act. Sadly, I think I wasn't hired because my credentials are amazing or because I can truly make a difference at work, I believe that I was hired to fill a Saudization quota. So far, I have finished successfully the BEC Preliminary- CEFR Level B1 certificate; and I'm enrolled in the Business Vantage- CEFR Level B2 certificate now and I intend to continue. They are a must for me if I want to fight to claim what I believe should have been mine- the promotion we spoke of. Of course this attitude was not welcomed by many people. Funny thing is that a female colleague commented on my step by saying "الشاطرة تغزل و لو برجل الحمار" - A smart woman will spin yarn even on a donkey's leg".

**Researcher:** What does that saying mean?

**Muntha:** that is a polite way to say that if I was good enough in my work, I don't need English to get promoted. Sometimes, I feel that women are the biggest enemies of women in this society. So, she approached me asking me about the English courses, I told her that I'm taking Business courses in English and they are Cambridge certificates. Then she sarcastically said "do you think that by doing this

you'll twist their arm to move you up? Don't' you know how this place work? I'm not sure Abu Abdullah will like that!" The Si Syaed mentality still prevails. I heard it from them they said if X [another female colleague in a higher position] becomes manager, I will ask for transference".

**Researcher:** who is them you are referring to here?

**Muntaha:** Male colleagues. They can't take the idea that a woman can be their supervisor.

**Researcher:** How did that make you feel? I mean being restrained in language development and being considered defiant?

**Muntaha:** being restrained did two things to me: The first thing is that it made me seriously think of moving to [a global oil and gas company] where they provide better development opportunities, and that would be brain waste for the bank; and the second thing is that being restrained heightened my creativity to find a local language school that tailored me a business communication course. Finally, I do not consider it defiance, I consider it ambition. When was ambition a taboo?

**Researcher:** interesting. Is that the only reason for learning English?

**Muntaha:** No. My kids are enrolled in an international school here; and I need to upgrade my English to keep up-to-date with their studies and curricula that is primarily in English. To be frank with you, I feel guilty that I pushed them into international schools because they are so young and I'm concerned that they will not speak Arabic fluently, and my biggest concern is that they might lose connection with reality that they are Saudis and start acting like Americans, especially that most of the kids in their schools are expatriates.

**Researcher:** I see. Have you taken any actions to curb the negative effects of that in your children?

**Muntaha:** As a matter of fact we did. We have enforced rules at home that communication between the kids and us should be in Arabic only, and English is for school work. I know that's not enough, but it's a start at least.

**Researcher:** Why did you chose studying English in Saudi Arabia, not abroad in the USA or the UK for example?

**Muntaha:** There are several reasons. I'm a mother as you already know. I cannot leave the family for an extended period of time. Secondly, even if I could leave the family for an extended period of time, the bank will not give me an extended time off to study what I want. Third and most importantly, the financial resources to study abroad are not sufficient. I believe language courses in Saudi Arabia are pricy; however, if you compare the total to the abroad experience, it is nothing. Going abroad needs a lot of money. However, I have no regrets in mind for doing this in Saudi Arabia. But as a banker, I keep thinking of "what if". There is a principal of cost of opportunity here which is the difference in return between a chosen investment and one that has been passed up. What I mean is that the return on investment for learning English in Saudi Arabia within the resources I have is good; but I believe that it might have been better if I went abroad.

**Researcher:** Do you think that going abroad would have benefited you more?

**Muntaha:** Let me be clear about my position: the one size fits all language courses in the West don't help that much, I mean I'm not interested in improving my everyday vocabulary and socialize in English language. As you know, I chose to study a specific English course that has clear objectives and aims here in Saudi Arabia. When I said that the benefit abroad would probably be more I was talking about the issues of, first of all forcing myself to speak English and not resort to Arabic for extra help; secondly, meeting others from different countries; and improving my accent maybe.

**Researcher:** I understand. OK, let me ask you about your experience learning English. Do you feel you have changed?

**Muntaha:** Do you mean my language skills have changed?

**Researcher:** No I mean in terms of who you are, your identity, how have you changed before learning English.

**Muntaha:** I can't say that English have changed my identity. I think identity is evolving, identity construction is not an easy thing to do, just like rearing a baby it takes years to build that kind of identity you wish. But I tell you, maybe English gave me more ways to explore new ideas, new technologies, new ways of being. I am more informed now than before. I'm more capable now dealing with my kids' education and engage with them on the level of school work more. I find that I developed new confidence...[chuckles]... I used to rehearse what I want to say to the Pilipino hair dresser before I go, my heart will start racing [laughs], my head is spinning and I pray that she doesn't ask something crazy

**Researcher:** And now?

**Muntaha:** Now I feel that I'm more confident. I can talk to whoever. Also I feel that my fighting spirit at work has changed since I can get more accurate info through English, and I can write nice reports.

**Researcher:** I see. Do you consider these changes positive or negative?

**Muntaha:** I think they are positive. The important thing is that I didn't allow English to affect my core identity. I'm Muslim, Saudi woman who is still committed to the teachings of my religion and the customs and values of my country.

**Researcher:** OK. Do you feel that by learning English you have acquired new beliefs or ideas?

**Muntaha:** New beliefs like what? I don't think so. I believe it has to do with personality change rather than identity.

**Researcher:** Do you agree that you are split between two worlds: English speaking world and Arabic speaking world?

**Muntaha:** hmmm. You can say that to a certain extent. But I need to highlight that my English speaking world is very limited to my classroom. You know, classmates and teacher only. My Arabic-speaking world is much wider and eclectic.

**Researcher:** Interesting. DO you feel that there is a conflict between the two worlds?

**Muntaha:** Not at all. As I have mentioned earlier, I don't allow English to interfere with my life. Perhaps the only conflict I have with English's interference is related to my kids. I don't want them to absorb English values and ignore their Saudi and Muslim values; and Arabic. And that's why we have the rule of communication at home.

**Researcher:** Which language, in your opinion, will have the greatest role in your future, and why?

**Muntaha:** When I talk about my future I talk about different futures. My future as a mother will highly depend on Arabic language: I want to teach my children Quran and Hadith, I want to communicate with them in Arabic to pass on our heritage and values. My future as a bank employee I believe is equally divided between English and Arabic: English for the sake of promotion and moving into foreign relations and investment; and Arabic is the language of day-to-day operation at the bank with my colleagues and bosses. My future as woman is also equally divided between English and Arabic: with English I'm semi-independent, I don't need my husband to go with me and help in communication like he used to do before. With English I kind of find it easier to get things done with foreign workers and helpers. However, Arabic is my mother tongue and it's the language I use to communicate with my family and friends.



**Researcher:** if you have to give a percentage, what percentage would you give to English?

**Muntaha:** I would say, maybe 25%.

**Researcher:** Very well. Do you think that there is a direct link between English language and freedom?

**Muntaha:** freedom?! Freedom of what? Can you please explain?

**Researcher:** What I mean is do you feel that have acquired freedom because of learning English?

**Muntaha:** Yes and No. Correct me if I'm wrong here. Your question has to do with the Saudi tradition of Mahram; and if English has set me free from my Mahram? This Mahram idea, in my opinion, is blown out of proportion. Can I travel abroad without my mahram's approval? No I can't. Can I go to a government office to issue documents with mahram? Also no I can't. I honestly don't see what's English has to do with it. This system is established long time ago, and it's not up to debate. However, English gave me more independence, not freedom. Let me explain, I can go to shopping mall on my own to buy something and communicate with the shopkeepers in English if they don't speak Arabic. I can go to a hospital now and explain to the nurse what's wrong. When you speak of freedom this puts me in the box of slave who cannot do anything without the master's permission, which is not the case.

**Researcher:** So, the answer is that English made you independent rather than free!

**Muntaha:** Exactly. Listen, the fact that some woman speaks English doesn't mean at all that they can act on things on their own in Saudi Arabia in matters that

require mahram by the law. It's the law. English facilitates things to us, but not in matters related to the law.

**Researcher:** Let's discuss now the issue of choosing Saudi Arabia to study English. You mentioned that your investment in English in Saudi Arabia is good within your resources. May I ask you to explain more?

**Muntaha:** Yes, sure. Life is expensive nowadays with 2 kids in international schools, mortgage to pay-off the house, and living expenses. So, our financial resources are very limited, and going abroad requires a huge amount of money. Add to that, I can't take time-off from work. One of the essential resources I have is my family's support. Whenever I go to the school, I leave my kids at my mom's house to look after them while I'm gone. Another important issue; and now you might think that she's very traditional Saudi [chuckles], I love the fact that my language school is all females. This gives me huge psychological relief. You know the sensitivity of men and women in class together in Saudi Arabia.

**Researcher:** You spoke about the culture of Saudi Arabia, the religion and the traditions. Let me ask you this: are the cultural beliefs about gender, women's roles and duties in Saudi Arabia different from the religious beliefs?

**Muntaha:** technically they're not supposed to be different, but in reality they are. In Islam, men and women are equal in everything, except for a couple of things like inheritance. There are certain parts of Quran that is interpreted in a way that serves the tribal purposes, the parts that has to do with the woman's role and duty. Saudi Arabia is deep-rooted in tribalism, and a huge part of that is concerned with women. If you read Islamic history you'll find that women had businesses, helped in wars, and travelled here and there; and when you use these stories to explain your position you get the answer that these women back then were different and same rules don't apply. In short, most of the day-to-day behaviours and beliefs about women are tribal and based on misinterpreted Quran tafsir.

**Researcher:** Did these beliefs and tribal behaviours you explained hindered your experience learning English?

**Muntaha:** Thank Allah no. Thank God, I come from an educated family from Jeddah. My mom and my dad are highly educated. My siblings are also educated; so they don't have that attitude. However, I have to say that when it comes to the public image of the women, they are pretty Saudi [chuckles], I mean no crazy clothes, irresponsible behaviors in public. Yet, when it comes to my husband, thank God he is very understanding, but the poor guy has to defend my actions a lot in front of his family, especially his parents. I mentioned to you earlier my encounter with a female colleague of mine. Believe it or not, the biggest tradition keepers in Saudi society are the women. I had several encounters with women who believe that doing what am doing, working, studying English, communicating in English with clerks, is against Saudism. But I am adamant to ignore them and move on.

**Researcher:** What does English mean to you?

**Muntaha:** Global language of communication. Instrument for me to reach my goals.

**Researcher:** Last question. How do you describe yourself?

**Muntaha:** I'm so proud to a Saudi Muslim woman from Jeddah. A wife and a mother of two amazing kids. Very ambitious and driven.

**Researcher:** Thank you so much for your time and input, and I wish you all success in your next level of English language.

**Muntaha:** Thank you, and good luck to you.

## Appendix 7: An Extract of a Coded Interview

Code	Data Chucks
ENGSTAT-KSA	I believe English is very important to us. I believe you are aware of the Kingdom's 2030 initiative? With this initiative English is not only a luxury, it is a must. The initiative will open the Kingdom's doors to foreign companies; and the locals need to be ready for that by at least good command of English. So, if it was exaggerated once, which I do not think it was, it is a must now.
ENGSTAT-WOM 1	so my answer is English is important to all Saudis, male or female
ENGSTAT-WOM 2	women should strive to learn more English because as mothers and probably the number 1 consumer of services in Saudi Arabia, English is very helpful to them.
GENDEQUAL 1a	Saudi women are Saudi citizens, and in my opinion they are not of less impotence than Saudi men
GENDEQUAL 2a	I don't think we should treat any sex any different when it comes to education.
GENDEQUAL 1b	Of course men and the proof is that in the bank where I work, more men than women are sent to attend these executive language courses, which are a series of advanced English courses to prepare employees to become managers and supervisors.
GENDEQUAL 2b	They [language courses] are a must for me if I want to fight to claim what I believe should have been mine
GENDEQUAL 1c	Now, the fact that more men are sent is an evidence that the society has more trust in men; and men consequently benefit more. Unfair!
GENDEQUAL 2c	Sadly, I think I wasn't hired because my credentials are amazing or because I can truly make a difference at work, I believe that I was hired to fill a Saudization quota
GENDEQUAL 3c	Sometimes, I feel that women are the biggest enemies of women in this society.
GENDEQUAL 4c	Male colleagues. They can't take the idea that a woman can be their supervisor
DEFY 1	Funny thing is that a female colleague commented on my step by saying "الشاطرة تغزل و لو برجل الحمار" - A smart woman will spin yarn even on a donkey's leg".
DEFY 2	she [Muntaha's co-worker] approached me asking me about the English courses, I told her that I'm taking Business courses in

PUSH-ENG1	English and they are Cambridge certificates. Then she sarcastically said “do you think that by doing this you’ll twist their arm to move you up? Don’t you know how this place work? I’m not sure Abu Abdullah will like that!” to upgrade my credentials to meet the criteria set for a higher position in the bank
PUSH-ENG2 PUSH-KSA: COST	I need to upgrade my English to keep up-to-date with their studies and curricula that is primarily in English I believe language courses in Saudi Arabia are pricy; however, if you compare the total to the abroad experience, it is nothing. Going abroad needs a lot of money.
EMERG 1- struggle	There is a principal of <b>cost of opportunity here</b> , which is the difference in return between a chosen investment and one that has been passed up. What I mean is that the return on investment for learning English in Saudi Arabia within the resources I have is good; but I believe that it might have been better if I went abroad
ENGIMPACT 1a	I can’t say that English have changed my identity. I think identity is evolving, identity construction is not an easy thing to do, just like rearing a baby it takes years to build that kind of identity you wish
ENGIMPACT 1b: ID MAINTENANCE ENG-AGENCY: Invest 1a	we have enforced rules at home that communication between the kids and us (parents) should be in Arabic only, and English is for school work ...the one size fits all language courses in the West don’t help that much... I am studying a specific English course (Business and Management Course) that has clear objectives and aims.
ENG-AGENCY: Invest 1b	I have finished successfully the BEC Preliminary- CEFR Level B1 certificate; and I’m enrolled in the Business Vantage- CEFR Level B2 certificate now and I intend to continue. They are a must for me if I want to fight to claim what I believe should have been mine- the promotion we spoke of

### Code Descriptions:

**ENGSTAT-KSA:** Describes Saudi women’s opinion about the status of English language in Saudi Arabia in general.

**ENGSTAT-WOM 1:** Describes Saudi women’s opinion about the status of English language as it pertains to Saudi women.

**GENDEQUAL 1a:** Describes Saudi women’s view about the gender equality in Saudi Arabia in terms of education.

**GENDEQUAL 1b:** Describes Saudi women’s views that men benefit from linguistic capital more.

**GENDEQUAL 1c:** Describes Saudi women's views regarding the reason behind gender disparity in Saudi society

**DEFY:** Describes ways in which women's action of learning English was interpreted as a sign of defiance.

**PUSH-ENG:** Describes the push factors that instigated women to invest in English language.

**ENGABROAD:** Describes the women's opinions regarding investing English abroad.

**PUSH-KSA:** The push factors that instigated the women to learn English inside of Saudi Arabia rather than abroad. Each code describes a unique factor.

**ENGABROAD:** Describes the Saudi women's opinions and thoughts about investing in learning language abroad.

**ENGIMPACT-ID 1a:** Describes the impact of learning English on Saudi women's identity.

**ENGIMPACT-ID 1b:** Describes the mechanisms applied by the Saudi women to Identity maintenance.

**ENG-AGENCY:** Describes the various ways women became agentive because of and while learning English in Saudi Arabia. Each code describes a unique case.

**ENG-AGENCY: Invest 1a:** Describes the Agency of investment in specific courses rather than conforming to a generic English language course.

**ENG-AGENCY: Invest 1b:** Describes the Agency of Investment in certification rather than generic language courses.

**EMERG 1- struggle:** Describes one of the emerging themes in the data, in this case, the category that emerged is English as a site of struggle.